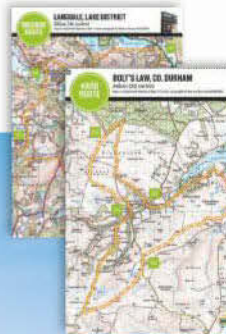


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whyte.bike

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ON THE COVER

Matt Simmonds and Will Chambers enjoy a picture-perfect trail on the Long Mynd. Photographer: Seb Rogers



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Starter for '15

Time to reflect on the last year as our final 2014 issue goes to press

They say that if you want to make time go fast, you divide it into little chunks, then tick them off as they go. Before you know, it's all over.



What's your riding
highlight of 2014?

I think that's why working on **mbr** makes each year fly by — our lives are split into four-week cycles (week one: answer emails, ride bikes; week two: ride bikes; week three: argue about products, ride bikes; week four: panic).

As a result, I'm seeing off our December issue wondering where the last year went. But at least I've got fond memories of some great highlights on the trail.

I made my first trip to the Alps this year and rode some ace singletrack. It wasn't particularly technical but it seemed to go on for ever (in a good way). Now I know why everyone who has been goes on and on about it — I absolutely loved every minute of it.

I had some cool rides in some less glamorous places too, like a fun trip to Woburn Sands where I desperately (i.e. unsuccessfully) attempted to keep up with riders much, much faster than me — and I even had a laugh riding a Cube e-bike.

There's plenty to do in 2015 but I feel like I crammed plenty into 2014. What was your highlight of the year? Let me know at mbr@timeinc.com

finn
Editor, **mbr**



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THE ALL-MOUNTAIN AND TRAIL BIKE CONCEPT FROM ORANGE — "IT JUST WORKS"



orangebikes

27.5

29



Big picture

'Epic' is a word that has lost its value lately, having been overused and tossed around cheaply, but a ride through the Chilcotin Mountains in British Columbia is one experience that fully merits the term. It's a true adventure through the untamed backcountry, over rugged alpine peaks, through lush green meadows, and deep in grizzly bear country without a hint of phone reception, anywhere. If it's escape you seek, I highly recommend a ride through the Chilcotin Mountains.

Mark Mackay



Big picture

Briançon: huge climbs, huge descents, lonely valleys and friendly locals. The Haute-Alpes region of France is known for the safety of Les Deux Alpes and Alpe d'Huez, but venture away from these tourist hotspots and explore the vast trail network that surrounds them and you'll begin to find the gems. High above Valloire, and a long way from home, Hope Technology's Simon Sharp is no stranger to gnarly downhills — what better place to put the future of braking through its paces!

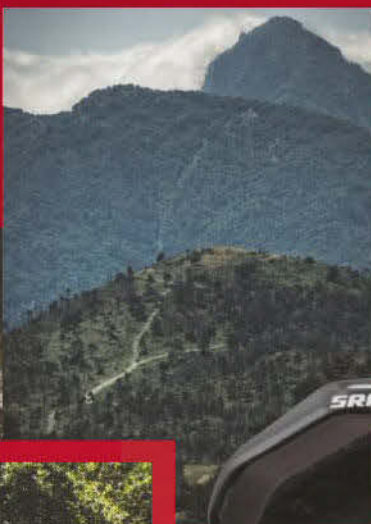
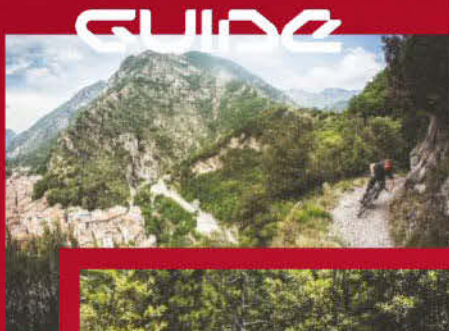
Sam Flanagan



Big picture

Humans may have descended from apes, but Roo Fowler may well have skipped a few steps along the way. Not that he spends hours picking insects out of his mate's hair, but he does have a propensity for climbing trees that reverses evolution. Here, he scales a grand old oak for a vantage point of one of the Surrey Hills classic trails.

Roo Fowler



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"IT'S TAKEN MORE THAN 10 YEARS FOR THIS UNLOVED STEPCHILD TO REACH MATURITY"

Edited by Jamie Darlow

GEAR

RIDES

FAST & FIT

INSPIRATION

GET STARTED

29ers come of age, page 112

FROM CHEAP TO CHIC

The notoriously good value Vitus brand has reinvented itself with a sleek new range

For the last few years, Vitus has been producing great value machines that ride out of their metallic skins. But for 2015 Chain Reaction Cycles's direct sales brand has added something priceless to the mix, something that makes people drool with desire: the wow factor. The new Escarpe 290 Pro has it in spades, with a stealth black finish and high-spec parts that could take Vitus from internet sales respectability to high fashion chic.

So what's changed on the new Escarpe 290? This bike represents a new direction for Vitus, content up until now to use a generic suspension platform as a starting point for further development. The Escarpe changes all this. It's the first time Vitus has put serious R&D time (18 months) into making a suspension platform from scratch. It's a bold step: the chance to build a bike better than any Vitus before, weighed against a costly error if it doesn't work as well.

The suspension design is more complex and sophisticated than the old Escarpe's, using a four-bar system in which the shock pierces the down tube and gets compressed at both ends.

So much for the technical overhaul — but how does it ride? We loved last year's Escarpe (see our summer review, po.st/escarpe) but you'll have to wait a couple of issues for our first impressions on the new 290 Pro.

■ **Release date:** January. **Contact:** vitusbikes.com

Bike weighs 29lb without pedals and the Pro version here costs £3,599.99

Bolt-on down tube protector and internal cable routing for Reverb Stealth

135mm of rear travel through RockShox Monarch RT3 shock

Escarpe 29 range starts at £1,499

Modern controls: 760mm bar and 45mm stem

RockShox Pike RCT3 fork with 150mm of travel

29er Crossmax XL wheelset with WTB Vigilante and Trail Boss tyres



The Buzz

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

*2014 took us to new riding highs,
on ground-breaking bikes and kit*

THE RIDES

*The natural ride was king of the
hill in 2014 as we explored the
Best of British Singletrack*

GRIZEDALE UNPLUGGED

This ride was all about stepping outside the limits of a trail centre, turning a man-made space into a natural big mountain ride with just a map and a sense of adventure. Imagine all the civil amenities of the Grizedale centre (showers, bike shop, cafe) married to the sense of adventure that comes with proper, rugged Lakes descents... we went beyond just imagining and scoped out a route.

Download the GPS here:
po.st/grizedale



THE QUANTOCKS

No dramatic peaks, no rocky passes, no National Park status: at first glance the Quantocks looks like a dead loss for decent mountain biking. But the concentration and quality of trails that fold into this small range of hills in Somerset make it a winner. We went in search of the best singletrack hidden in the steep combs and barren heathland.

Download the GPS here:
po.st/quantock





NAN BIELD PASS

From big mountain adventure rides like Snowdon and Torridon in Scotland to low-level singletrack like the Quantocks in Somerset and Cut Gate in the Peak District, we've covered some amazing stuff in 2014. Our personal favourite though, the best of the best, is Nan Bield pass in the Lake District — alpine hairpins cut into the side of

the hill, steep chutes and loose boulders that all demand skill, concentration and a degree of pluck. This is proper mountain biking, the perfect blend of adventure and adrenaline — the Lakeland valley landscape ain't half bad, either.

Visit the 20 best rides of 2014 and download the routes at po.st/bestbrit

THE BIKES

We tested over 100 bikes this year, but only three get to stand on the podium in our pick of the best of the best...

SPECIALIZED'S STUMPJUMPER FSR COMP EVO

With 140mm of travel up front and 5mm less on the rear, the Stumpy Evo hits that classic sweet-spot in terms of weight, capability, versatility and — ultimately — price. It rides brilliantly in the majority of situations thanks to its low bottom bracket and slack head angle and it scalps the rest of the field on price too. There's nothing you need to change on the bike — no swapping out of

bars or stem or even dropper post as they're included as standard.

Universally praised by all who've had the good fortune to ride it, the Stumpjumper has helped changed attitudes to 29in wheels forever. It's not just about wheelsize though — the Stumpy Evo is just an amazing bike that's easily deserving of our 2014 Bike of the Year award. **£2,500, specialized.com**



WHYTE 905

The 905 is the best trail hardtail we've ridden. It's ultra-modern in design, with forward thinking geometry that offers peerless handling and a great frame that proves stiff without jarring. You can ride the 905 as hard as any full-susser and still be grinning from ear to ear.

£1,599, whytebikes.com

YT INDUSTRIES CAPRA PRO

YT's Capra Pro is the new go-to bike for enduro racers or anyone looking for a trail bike with a bit more muscle. For just over £3,000 the German brand has somehow managed to deliver a carbon 650b bike with 170mm of supple Bos suspension. Simply amazing. The top value is matched by a faultless ride that offers stability and fun in equal measure.

£3,191, yt-industries.com





THE GEAR

Last year's high-priced bling became this year's reasonably priced products...

LESS IS NOT MORE

When SRAM pioneered the single-ring 1x11 set-up it cost thousands, silly money. Well, all that R&D money must have been paid back because the new X1 drivetrain looks like XX1, works like XX1, and costs two-thirds the price.

This year there's a host of new single-ring chainrings with narrow/wide tooth profiles at a fraction of SRAM's price. Try Superstar's I/O Chainring. Coming soon for £30 is a range extender on the rear cassette so you don't lose the wide range of gear ratios.

£25.99, superstarcomponents.com



MORE BOING FOR YOUR BUCK

In 2014 there was a new, very appealing alternative to spending upwards of £700 on a fork; DT Swiss's reworked XMM is lightweight, incredibly stiff, and easily the best-value trail fork on the market.

£550, hotlines-uk.com



PRICE DROP

KS's new eTen dropper post will get you moving for just over £100.

It's not perfect — a touch weighty and you have to thread the cable in yourself, but it's extremely reliable, you can set the height anywhere in its 100mm range, and the action is precise.

£125, jungleproducts.co.uk



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HOT STUFF

WHAT WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT THIS MONTH



**MOST
WANTED**

ODI AG-1 LOCK-ON £24.99

Signature products are usually nothing more than a stock item with a pro's squiggle printed on them. But, although Aaron Gwin's Signature AG-1 Lock-Ons do incorporate his initials, thankfully they break the mould with some actual design innovation.

ODI says Gwin likes to ride with his hand on the ends of the grip, which when using a regular lock-on puts his palms directly over the outer locking collar. To reduce discomfort and fatigue one solution is to cover the end with rubber, which is what ODI did with the Troy Lee Grip, but this time it has eliminated the outer collar completely. It has also designed the outer part

of the AG-1 with a smooth angled transition, so that the palm rests comfortably on this section when riding. The transition changes into more of a step on the underside to provide a reference point for the fingers and to prevent them from actually hanging off the grip, which can lead to impacts with branches, trees, rocks etc.

Instead of a soft or alloy plug, the AG-1 has a hard plastic cap on the end, which is reinforced underneath with a metal insert. The plastic cap acts like a glide plate and is less likely to grab if you go down in a crash.

In terms of surface, Gwin wanted something that was thin and grippy in most conditions.

ODI settled on a modified knurl pattern but added four angled ribs on the outside edge, which are designed to fall into the articulation points of the hand. These ribs are slightly harder than the rest of the grip, so they should prove more durable too.

Overall diameter is similar to the current ODI Ruffian, but the AG-1 has 10mm extra grip space due to the single clamp. The clamps also feature larger 3mm Allen bolts to prevent stripping and increase strength. The grips weigh 99g (a pair) and come in four colours, which just happen to match Gwin's new Signature Troy Lee riding gear. ison-distribution.com



HOT TO TROT

If you're sick of the same old sweet trail food then chomp down on one of Mule Bar's Eastern Express energy bars. With a mix of spices and pistachio it should put some fire in your belly when the hammer goes down. **Pack of five £7.99, mulebar.com**



FASHION GUIDE

The SplashMap is a waterproof, washable and even wearable (use it as a buff perhaps) OS map with 1:25,000 scaling. Buy a standard map or select a specific area of the country for a clear, colour cartographic. **£24.99, splash-maps.com**



JOE BLOW

Not just your average cuppa. The Aero Press uses a syringe-style pump with disposable filters to deliver a shot of Joe that's packed with all the flavour of a French press but smooth and creamy like an espresso. **£24.99, aeropress.co.uk**



MATERIAL GAINS

Fabric is a new UK component brand from the company behind Charge. The classic Scoop saddle now comes under this banner, as well as a whole range of boutique seats using high-end materials and groundbreaking construction. **£39.99, fabric.cc**



SPEED CAMERA

With a built in GPS receiver, Sony's latest Action Cam tells the world how fast you're going. There's also a SteadyShot mode and a remote screen to make sure you don't end up with hours of footage showing only your front wheel. **£329, sony.co.uk**



FLAT OUT

With its sticky SlipNot rubber sole, Specialized's new 2FO Flat shoe could rival the erstwhile Five Ten Freerider. It has a durable thermo-bonded upper, lightweight Airmesh construction and Body Geometry fit as standard. **£90, specialized.com**



FRESH SHOOTS

UK firm Broken Riders has just launched some new colours of its popular bamboo T-shirts. The lush fabric feels great against your skin and is a satisfyingly eco-friendly choice. **£22 plus P&P, brokenriders.com**



LIGHT FANTASTIC

These new Celium gloves from 100% are so light that they feel like you're not wearing any at all. The single-layer Clarino palm also offers incredible feel and control. They're cheap too. Five colours, S-XL sizes. **£19.99, decade-europe.com**



ELECTRIC SHOCK

As opposed to Fox's disposable digital shock pump, this Syncros SP1.0 is a keeper thanks to a replaceable battery and industrial build quality. The hose swivels 360° and there's an easy-to-use bleed knob for fine-tuning pressure. **£69.99, syncros.com**

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YOUR EXPERT

TOM HUTTON

Tom is an MBLA-qualified guide, as well as resident **mbr** routes guru and dirty-weather tester



WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

Know who to call if things go wrong.

Call the emergency services (112 or 999 — either will work on any network) and ask for mountain rescue. Give them a grid reference, a description of the emergency and an idea of the equipment you have. The trained operator will ask you about access, obstacles, weather, etc. Keep calm and follow their instructions.



KITCHEN SINK

Brush up on your repair skills and add some emergency kit to your tool bag for longer, more remote rides. Think about what can go wrong and what you can carry to repair it. Make sure you've a spare gear hanger for your bike — they weigh nothing, yet a broken

one can ruin an otherwise great day. Carry a spare spoke, or perhaps an emergency one — usually made from Kevlar cord. Carry a Power Link and a chain-splitter and know how to use them. Learn how to straighten a wheel and fix a buckled rotor — practice at home first, because it's far easier. And read up on how to repair a torn tyre and bodge a broken freehub.



TECH FAIL

Low phone signal? Register your number with the emergency SMS text service (send 'register' to 999) and text in your emergency. No phone signal or battery? You'll need to get to a landline or someone with a working mobile. First, make casualties safe and comfortable and leave someone with them if possible. If you're trying to

summon help from nearby, six short blasts on a whistle is the accepted signal. Wait a minute and repeat. Three short blasts back means someone has heard you. Keep repeating your signal until you can see the other people.



DODGE THE STITCHES

Even an innocuous-seeming tumble can easily result in a nasty injury. Immediate treatment can make a huge difference to the victim and those involved — imagine how helpless they'll feel if you don't have a clue. And the same applies if the victim isn't even in your group. Take a two-day first-aid course, preferably one that focuses on cycling or at least the outdoors. Encourage your mates to join you. If you can help them, they should be able to help you too.



THE SEVEN Ps

Proper planning and preparation prevent piss poor performance. Things sometimes go wrong, that's just part of mountain biking. Don't wait to be forced into making difficult decisions in stressful situations — check out all your options in comfort when planning your route. Calculate how long it should take you. Identify checkpoints to see how you're doing against the plan. Calculate a cut-off time or place — for example, if you don't make Point X by midday, then you'll turn around or cut the ride short. Identify the escape routes. Work out where you can get outside help if needed. But also look at the positive side; if the weather's great and everyone's riding really well, it seems a shame to stop early. Try to plan a few possible extensions.



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BOUNCE BACK WITH STYLE

If you've been off the bike for a while, jumps, drops and steep stuff can seem terrifying. Pro rider Rachael Walker explains how to face your demons

BRING BACK THE FUN

Injuries are rubbish, painful and highly inconvenient. We'd all like to start where we left off; jump straight back on the bike and feel completely at ease, but it's often not the case. Take it easy, ride your favourite trail and have some fun. Pump tracks or BMX tracks are a great way to build up fitness quickly and regain flow on the bike. You can do as much or as little as you like and refresh your bike handling skills at the same time.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO BE AFRAID

Each time I've been injured and off the bike I've come back hungrier to ride, but the last time was different. I was petrified of crashing — the thought of riding at speed was seriously unnerving. I'd lost confidence and couldn't stop beating myself up about it, which created a vicious circle of self-doubt. Don't be afraid of feeling nervous, because you're bound to feel rusty after time out from the bike. Relax, and don't put pressure on yourself to be super-pinned straight away!

THINK POSITIVELY

Being injured can be pretty boring. If your injury allows it, maintaining some level of fitness through short walks or turbo sessions can give you a mental and physical boost each day and help stave off the extra pounds. A combination of being injured, unfit and overweight can create a massive uphill battle. Helping yourself feel as good as possible in this situation can make recovery less 'painful'.

LISTEN TO THE DOC

When the doctor gives you advice, whether it's to rest, keep the weight off the injury or keep the injured area still, do what you're told! They're probably right. Ignore your mates who might tell you stories of coming back from a broken arm after three weeks of drinking a pint of milk daily, or taking bone pills. If the doc says six weeks he means six weeks. Trying to do too much too early could aggravate the injury and delay recovery — running a marathon with a broken arm isn't the best idea.

YOUR EXPERT

RACHAEL WALKER

Corporate lawyer turned Hope downhill rider, currently returning from injury after a separated shoulder at the British Downhill Series



LAGER v WINE!

In the name of science (honest), we test alcohol as a recovery drink

Recovery drink, massage, stretching, curly kale smoothies... they're all ideal for recovery after a ride. But let's face facts — it's an alcoholic drink most of us reach for after working up a sweat, so what's the best recovery aid, wine or lager? If we're going to do it wrong, which one's the most right?

LAGER

Containing 230 calories, carbohydrates and proteins, lager looks like a perfect recovery option. Unfortunately calories from alcohol are 'empty calories' with no nutritional value, so will have little positive impact on re-energising the body. Yes, lager contains vitamins and minerals, but the traces are so small, they won't make any significant contribution to your

diet. Lager will also make you pee more due to its diuretic properties, which isn't a good thing, especially if you've been sweating heavily from riding.

RED WINE

While red wine contains virtually no protein it does contain polyphenols, which include a group of compounds called flavonoids that provide antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits.

Reports have even suggested some polyphenols help prevent cardiovascular diseases and cancers.

Red wine also contains resveratrol, which according to research helps prevent damage to blood vessels, reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol and prevent blood clots. However, most of that research has only been done on animals, not people.

LAGER (1 pint/568ml)		RED WINE (1 glass/125ml)
233cal	CALORIES	85cal
17g	CARBOHYDRATES	3.1g
1.5g	PROTEIN	0.1g
0g	FAT	0g



THE VERDICT

Put simply, the body doesn't like booze, so will immediately try and get rid of it. This means it will prioritise this over everything else, so other processes such as absorbing nutrients and burning fat get pushed aside. Beer and wine are both losers, then — it's not what you want to hear, but alcohol isn't a great recovery drink. Then again, you probably knew that already.

The winner? Lager has more protein and carbohydrates, while red wine does contain other nutrients that play a role in the recovery process. So it's a tie. Lager, wine, ales, strawberry daiquiris all taste good, they help calm us down and offer a decent reward after a ride. Just don't mistake booze for a recovery aid.

TRY THIS

ADNAMS SOLE STAR

Low alcohol beer is a better option as its diuretic properties aren't as strong, so you won't lose as much fluid. And per 500ml bottle Sole Star has only 145 calories, which is significantly less than lager. It tastes good too.



45

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MAN ON A MISSION

*Charity begins at home on the **mbr** forum, as parts are donated to build auctioned bike*



When reader Stan Iredale asked the **mbr** forum for help building a charity bike nothing could have prepared him for the avalanche of replies that followed. Within minutes forum dwellers were offering up their worn but well-loved bike components, from saddles ("gaffer tape repaired but perfectly rideable") to stems, tyres, pedals and posts, all were offered up as the community rallied to a good cause.

"My God, it's been overwhelming," Iredale told us. "The reactions of so many people have been humbling. I've run out of epicness-type words to use!"

Iredale's plan was to build a bike from parts and sell it at auction to raise funds for Lynn Baker, who had lost her daughter Lucy, aged six, from a terminal illness. Baker was

trying to raise £3,000 for a wooden bench and plaque to go next to Lucy's grave, and to help the Demelza Children's Hospice. Touched by the story, Iredale had to help.

With just an old 2003 Saracen Xess frame and an idea, Iredale posted on the forum asking for help. The response was instant — Saracen offered new decals, Steve Gould at Decma Ltd offered to powder coat the bike and the fourumites provided wheels and drivetrain, and will hopefully help build up the bike too. Fox importer Mojo came up with a refurbished Fox F-Series fork.

The bike is scheduled to go for auction in October with the £3,000 goal long since reached. If you want to get involved visit youcaring.com/lucybaker, lucysdream.co.uk or the **mbr** forum.



Parts courtesy of forum dwellers, pups model's own

BEAT THE WINTER

Don't let the dark months spoil your riding

STAY IN AND RIDE

Something is brewing in the bowels of the earth under Louisville, Kentucky, USA — the world's first underground bike park, complete with trails, and a jump room. Around 30,000 square metres have been allocated to bikes in the Louisville Mega Cavern, and it should be opening around January 2015.

If Kentucky is too far to travel then try Manchester, where Dirt Factory will be the UK's first indoor mountain bike centre. You'll have to wait until next

winter though as it won't open until October 2015.

■ louisvillemegacavern.com

TRAIL CENTRES ARE YOUR FRIEND

You know those soft, loamy natural trails that feel amazing in the summer? Stay away from them in the winter, when they slow you down and you smash them up. Instead keep your speed up at a trail centre that's designed and armoured to ride in all weathers.

■ **Start at Bike Park Wales:** po.st/bpw

SUN, SEA AND SCHRALP

Last year the destination of choice for Brits wanting to escape the mud was Malaga (or New Zealand if they were minted). This year we think Madeira could be the next hotspot, off the west coast of Morocco and on the very fringes of the EU. Jacob Gibbins covered it in the Summer 2014 issue of **mbr**, and we've all been itching to go ever since.

■ freeridemadeira.com

Madeira: have your cake and eat it

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5 WAYS TO A PERFECT PIKE

Jon Cancellier, the man behind RockShox's cutting-edge BlackBox race programme, reveals the secrets to an optimum set-up

1 AIR VOLUME

A larger volume is easier to bottom-out, a smaller volume will ramp up more towards the end of the stroke. It's easy to change on the Pike Solo Air by adding or subtracting red Bottomless Tokens. Note: Dual Position Pike forks don't have this feature.

DIY STEPS

The tokens are housed in the spring leg (left leg as you sit on the bike). Remove the dust-cap, depress the Schrader valve with a 3mm Allen key, and let all the air out. Using a 24mm socket, unscrew the top-cap assembly from the fork. Check your fork against the table below to see if you're running the correct number of spacers.

"For more aggressive riders, I recommend one or two tokens at 160mm", explains Cancellier. "For each

10mm decrease in travel, I add one token. For example, 150mm would be two or three tokens, 140mm three or four tokens etc."

When installing the tokens, ensure you thread them securely into the top-cap and the adjacent token. Were they to come loose, they could jam inside the fork. Reinstall the top cap to 28Nm.



TOP TIP

Keep your Pike running sweetly with a lower leg service after approx 200 hours of riding. Watch our step-by-step video guide here: po.st/pike

TOP TIP

As with any suspension product, it's well worth making a note of your settings as you play with them so that you can always return to a good benchmark



TOP TIP

If you ride somewhere new, you may have to adjust your settings to suit the terrain. For instance, go somewhere fast and rough, like the Alps, and you may have to run slower rebound damping, or change your air pressure

BOTTOMLESS TOKENS CHART

What's pre-installed and what's possible

■ Factory installed
■ Optional

	150mm	160mm		120mm	140mm	150mm	160mm
26in/650b	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	29in	■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■

2 AIR PRESSURE

"Now that we have reduced the air volume in the fork by adding Bottomless Tokens, we can run less air pressure for better small-bump absorption but with increased bottoming resistance", says Cancellier. "I would aim for 5-10psi less depending on how many tokens were added."



RockShox supplies an air pressure guide printed on the left leg. In the case of the Pike, we've found the suggested pressures are a good start point. Combine the recommended pressure with the sag indicator (printed on the right leg) to get the setup exactly where you want it.

3 LOW-SPEED COMPRESSION

If you have an RCT3 model fork, the low-speed compression is adjusted using the smaller-diameter knob on the top of the right leg. There will be around 13 clicks of adjustment on offer. Note: The low-speed adjustment only has an effect when the blue outer dial is in the open position (two o'clock when viewed from in the saddle).



Cancellier says: "Use the low-speed adjuster (black knob on RCT3; main knob on RC) to adjust initial movement in the fork. If you've changed the volume and lowered the air pressure, you can increase low-speed compression to let the fork ride higher, but still have it supple over small bumps."

4 REBOUND ADJUSTMENT

Altering rebound is done using the red knob at the base of the right leg. There should be around 20 clicks of adjustment. Turning it in the direction of the hare will reduce damping; tortoise to increase.



"This is always a personal adjustment", says Cancellier, "dependent on your air pressure — rebound is trying to control the force of the air spring returning to full extension." Thus, heavier riders running higher air pressures will likely require more rebound damping than lighter riders. "Also,

some riders prefer a slightly faster fork while others a slower one. Whichever you prefer, you should aim to have the fork returning in a controlled manner that isn't so fast as to return violently, or excessively slow."

5 MAXLE TENSION

The sleek new Maxle is a more robust unit with a simplified action. "To get your Maxle set up, thread it all the way in, back it off half a turn and close the lever. Check the lever position and think of it as hands on



a clock. We run the Maxle pointing straight back — nine o'clock (number nine on the Maxle). If you take the Maxle out and look at the white line and the corresponding number, you can then push the head in and turn the Maxle until you get your desired position."

WE ASKED

WHAT'S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU'VE FOUND BY THE TRAIL?

Wheelie bin, bits of mudguard, bike computers, mobile phone, iPod Touch, chainring bolts, lights, chain, backpack with trainers in

@peds223

A burned-out fruit machine in the middle of bloody nowhere (pre-smartphone)

@unkdamonk

A single stiletto heel lodged in a tree, in the middle of nowhere

@Chris_Noteeth

A wallet from 1966. No joke

@feedbacksports

Best I've found was part of a helmet imbedded in a tree

Greg Stephen

There was a discarded vacuum cleaner on the

Mary Towneley loop that I used as a convenient trail marker for several years

@TransAlpUK

This is what happens when Mods go mountain biking. Reflectors every-bloody-where!

Mike Allenby

Have your say on...



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First rides

SWINGING A LEG OVER WHAT'S HOT THIS MONTH

GIANT REIGN ADVANCED 27.5 0

Reign Advanced 1 £3,299 / 650b / giant-bicycles.com

NEED TO KNOW

- Redesigned 160mm-travel enduro/all-mountain bike
- Aluminium and carbon frames available
- Three bikes in the range, from £2,199 to £3,999
- Increased fork offset gives more responsive steering

Is Giant finally coming out of its shell and daring to be different? It's certainly been bold with the Reign

Changes are afoot at Giant Bicycles; with the reintroduction of the Reign, there are signs that it's beginning to shed its conservative image and loosen that corporate tie. Not only does this revamped all-mountain/enduro platform get great spec and Giant's signature value-for-money, but the progressive geometry and loud colours are bang up to date, and there's even a touch of edginess to the handling.

Before we discuss that issue, let's take a walk around the new bike. As is normally the case with a new product from Giant, the Reign will be available in both Aluxx SL aluminium or Advanced Grade carbon flavours. With no carbon rear triangle

on offer, all Reigns will share the same Aluxx SL back end. This limits the weight saving to 200g for the carbon frame, but undoubtedly reduces costs and helps keep the price competitive.

Although the range comprises four models, only three of those will be brought to the UK. Of course, the only one available to ride at the launch won't be sold over here — the range-topping Reign Advanced 0. It's a decision that creates the curious situation where the most expensive version available in the UK is not carbon but aluminium; it being the Reign 1 at £3,999, some £700 more than the carbon Advanced 1.

Giant's familiar twin-link Maestro suspension design gives 160mm of rear



Twin-link Maestro design with 160mm travel

Longer, slacker,
lower and more fun

SPECIFICATION

Frame Advanced Carbon/Aluxx SL aluminium rear, 160mm travel
Shock RockShox Monarch Plus DebonAir RC3
Fork RockShox Pike RCT3 Dual Position Air, 130/160mm travel
Wheels DT Swiss Spline One wheelset, Schwalbe Magic Mary 2.35in Snakeskin, Trail Star front/Schwalbe Hans Dampf 2.35in Snakeskin Pace Star rear tyres
Drivetrain SRAM XX1 crank, r-mech and shifters
Brakes SRAM Guide RSC, 200mm/180mm
Components Truvativ Blackbox Boobar, Truvativ Holzfeller stem, RockShox Reverb Stealth seatpost
Weight 12.5kg (27.5lb)
Sizes S, M, L

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L
Head angle 65.1°
Seat angle 68.6°
BB height 340mm
Chainstay 435mm
Front centre 785mm
Wheelbase 1,218mm
Down tube 711mm
Top tube 640mm
Reach 458mm

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Fork offset

First there was Trek with its G2 geometry; now Giant has got in on the act, tinkering with the fork offset to alter steering feel. Increasing offset from 42mm to 46mm has reduced the trail measurement, a key influence on handling. As a result, despite the slack head angle, it's more responsive to steering inputs and needs less effort to initiate turns. Giant says that the change came about purely as a result of rider feedback after extensive 'blind' testing.

While 4mm may not seem like much, the difference is clear; it took some time to recalibrate my inputs to the additional sensitivity. Is it better? That's a bit harder to answer. Personally, I've never struggled with similar bikes running standard offsets, but after a few days riding the new Reign, I became a lot more in tune with the handling.

Offset is increased by 4mm. It's a subtle enhancement

travel in this guise, actuated on all models by a RockShox shock; specifically, the DebonAir version of either the Monarch or Monarch Plus, depending on spec. Along with bearings for the upper shock mount, the DebonAir's stronger negative spring certainly helps the small-bump performance, but don't think that the Reign gives up all its travel without a fight; it's still

Giant's decision to give up on 29ers has evidently sharpened its focus

surprisingly progressive, in part due to the relatively high shock pressures required.

One glance at the numbers is enough to tell you that the Reign is fully on-trend in terms of geometry. With a 65° head angle and 1,220mm wheelbase (size large), it's the longest, lowest and slackest Giant ever built (excluding the Glory DH bike).

Compared to the Trance, the chainstay length has been reduced by 5mm and there's 30mm more standover height than the old Reign. Better still, the restrictive Overdrive 2 fork steerer has been completely dropped for 2015, giving you more options when it comes to stem lengths. What's desperately missing is an XL frame size — the large I rode would be too small for riders over 6ft.

Giant's decision to give up on 29ers has undoubtedly given it a better sense of focus, and that's absolutely clear in the

impressive new Reign. Having said that, the 160mm segment is one of the most hotly contested markets at the moment, and one in which all the big brands are upping their game. So, within that context, how will the new Reign stack up against the competition? It's a question we can't wait to answer, and I'm sure we'll have a lot of fun finding out.

Danny Milner

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION



WE LOVE

Giant is starting to let its hair down. No more Overdrive 2.



WE HATE

Needs an XL frame size. Lighter steering won't be everyone's cup of tea.



SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061
T6 SCR aluminium,
130mm travel
Shock RockShox
Monarch
Debonair RT3
Fork RockShox Pike
RC, 130mm travel
Wheels SRAM
Roam 40, Maxxis
Ardent/Ardent Race
2.25/2.2in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM X1
Brakes SRAM Guide
RS, 180/160mm
Components
Whyte, RockShox
Reverb Stealth
Sizes S, M, L
Weight 13kg (28.6lb)

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L
Head angle 67.5°
Seat angle 73.3°
BB height 331mm
Chainstay 420mm
Front centre 727mm
Wheelbase 1,147mm
Top tube 609mm

WHYTE T-130 WORKS SCR

£2,999 / 650b / whytebikes.com

A surprising addition to the Whyte range with an equally surprising performance

NEED TO KNOW

- New 130mm travel 650b trail bike
- Dedicated SCR (single chainring) design for 1x11
- Sleek intergrip seat clamp
- Prices start at £1,999 for T-130 SX

A couple of months back I attended the launch of Whyte's 2015 range at Cwmcaern. The focus was its new SCR (Single Chain Ring) bikes that have been designed around SRAM's 1x11 drivetrains. The first one that I rode was the much-improved G-150 that we featured last month. I then had a blast on the T-129 Works SCR — you can read a full test on page 122.

After riding both bikes, I took one look at the new T-130 Works SCR that was leant up against Whyte's matt-back Sprinter and thought to myself: why on earth would Whyte build a 130mm-travel 650b bike?! If you're going to ride a 650b bike then you'd be crazy not to have the extra muscle of the 150mm G150. Alternatively, if you want a tight, fast-rolling package for bashing out the miles, there's already the perfect

companion in the 29in wheeled T-129. The T-130 just didn't make sense.

Starting from such a negative standpoint I wanted to give the bike the best possible chance to impress, so I swapped the 70mm stem that comes as standard on the size large for the 60mm from the size small. I also fitted an extra volume reducer to the 130mm-travel Pike fork for a little more ramp-up, then checked the pressure in the Maxxis Ardent tyres. It's pretty much the same process I'd go through if this had been a full-blown bike test.

Two corners in, I made a complete about-turn. Not only did the size L feel perfectly balanced and incredibly capable, it had the best rear suspension of any Whyte I've ever ridden. Small-bump sensitivity was in abundance, and smooth progression in the latest Quad 4 suspension meant that the

T-130 didn't rip through its travel too easily. More importantly, it didn't choke in the mid-stroke like the G-150.

With better suspension and the handling that resulted, I could ride the T-130 harder and with more confidence than the G-150. I was buzzing. Granted, it didn't feel as solid, but that didn't slow me down any. Being proved wrong has never felt so good.

Alan Muldoon



1ST IMPRESSION



WE LOVE

It's the best Whyte full-sus to date.



WE HATE

There's no XL size option for taller riders.

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The old Pitch was a classic, can this one rekindle the flame?

NEED TO KNOW

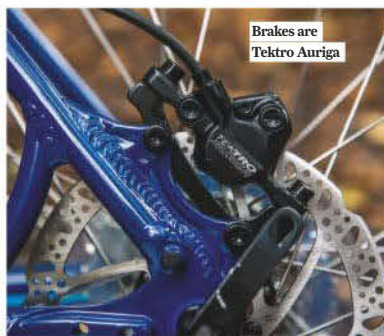
- 650b entry-level hardtail
- Three bike range: from £425-£550
- Custom-tuned 100mm travel SR Suntour suspension fork
- Lightweight aluminium frame

If you've been mountain biking a while, you may remember the original Specialized Pitch. It was an absolute ripper — 150mm of sorted suspension, great geometry, and a bargain at £1,500. It was way ahead of its time and was the forerunner for a lot of the modern trail bikes you see around today, albeit with smaller 26inch wheels. Specialized may have killed it off too soon but we have very fond memories of it here at **mbr**.

The new Pitch is nothing like the old one. It's an entry-level hardtail with 650b wheels and a basic SR Suntour suspension fork. We asked Specialized whether the new Pitch has anything in common with the old one; it turns out the new bike uses the famous moniker just because it's a good name, and good names can be hard to come by.

Three models come under the Pitch banner, separated by just £125. They all use the same A1 Premium aluminium frame, the difference is in the spec; the top-end Comp has a slightly better fork and a nine-speed rear cassette.

The first thing I'd recommend doing on the Pitch Comp is chopping some length off the seatpost. It's a full 400mm on the large frame but only has a 100mm of height adjustment due to the bottle bosses on the inside of the seat tube getting in the way. It wouldn't go any lower than my maximum saddle height, and riding with your seat up, especially if you're a first-timer, doesn't really inspire confidence when descending.



SPECIFICATION

Frame A1 aluminium
Fork SR Suntour XCM, 100mm travel
Wheels Specialized Hi-Lo disc hubs, Stout disc rims, Fast Trak Sport 2.0in tyres
Drivetrain Specialized Stout crankset, Shimano Acera 9-speed r-mech, Altus f-mech and shifters
Brakes Tektro Auriga 160mm rotors
Components Specialized Body Geometry saddle, Specialized 3D forged 75mm stem, Specialized low-rise handlebars
Sizes XS, S, M, L, XL
Weight 13.8kg (30.4lb)

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L
Head angle 70.5°
Seat angle 73°
BB height 301mm
Chainstay 424mm
Front centre 670mm
Wheelbase 1,094mm

Even with the saddle lowered, the new Pitch won't set the world alight like the original, but it's a great first step into mountain biking. The fork felt smooth and controlled and the low BB height somewhat offsets the twitchy steering. Granted, you may get more bike for your buck if you buy from a mail-order brand, but the Pitch is likely to hold its second-hand value — often a key consideration, especially at this end of the market — plus you'll get the perk of dealer support.

Paul Burwell

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION



WE LOVE

Affordable entry-level bike for the novice rider.



WE HATE

If you want to put the saddle down, you are going to have to take a hacksaw to the seatpost.

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13 INCLINE DELTA

£1,399.99 / 650b / halfords.com

The new brand from Halfords promises simplicity and value



NEED TO KNOW

- New brand from Halfords: 'high performance, low maintenance'
- Four models in the Incline range, sharing the same 7005 alloy frame
- RockShox Revelation fork delivers 130mm of travel
- New SRAM X1 drivetrain and PressFit BB30

Halfords has a new bike brand called 13, complete with road, cyclo-cross, urban and, of course, mountain bikes. And boy is it taking itself seriously — the website features wind-tunnel testing, moody lighting, and dramatic music to rival a Michael Bay movie.

Halfords is keeping its other premium bike range, Boardman, so 13 is really a reflection of how big this retailer is in terms of bike sales — Halfords has seen a 35 per cent increase in 'premium customers' in a year, it says. It's also about to launch a total of 13 new 13 Bikes stores to cater for the new models, which are also available through click-and-collect at any Halfords.

The Incline Delta has some amazing kit on it. Starting with the drivetrain, it's great to see 13 dodging the triple chainset trap and embracing the latest SRAM X1 technology. With a 30-tooth chainring and 11-speed on the back, the gearing seems spot-on for trail riding. The crankset is fed into a big PressFit 30BB that lends the bike some stiffness. There's an integrated, sealed headset too, which

goes towards 13's goal of making the bike low-maintenance.

The bar is wide enough at 720mm but sadly the stem is size-specific, growing to a daft 90mm-long on the large and XL frames. Up front, a RockShox Revelation fork with 130mm travel is a quality choice, far superior to any other bike at this price point — the winning bike from November's 650b hardtail test, the Whyte 901, could only manage a Sektor fork. The new Avid Guide RS brakes are classy too, with loads of control and power to rein in the speed that fork and excellent WTB Trail Boss tyres should allow.

On my first ride, though, I didn't feel I could tap into all that promised speed.



SRAM X1 30-tooth chainring

SPECIFICATION

Frame 7005 triple butted alloy with Smooth Welds
Fork RockShox Revelation Solo Air, 130mm travel
Wheels 13 MS rims, WTB Trail Boss Comp 2.25in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM X1
Brakes Avid Guide RS 180/160mm
Components 13MS
Sizes S, M, L, XL
Weight 11.94kg (26.3lb)

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L
Head angle 67°
Seat angle 68°
BB height 329mm
Chainstay 420mm
Front centre 712mm
Wheelbase 1,132mm
Down tube 699mm

The riding position feels way too high because the BB is lofty, so while I didn't clip my pedals, I never felt like pushing it in the corners either. The high front end can probably be fixed by fitting a shorter stem; ask Halfords to change it before leaving the shop.

My guess is that the two lower models in the range (of four bikes; this is the top) might prove much better options — they share the same frame but carry less travel in the fork, meaning a lower front-end and BB. They might even be better value — £1,400 seems like a lot of money when the frame is the same one used for the £500 model.

Jamie Darlow

mbr 1ST IMPRESSION



WE LOVE

The stunning build on this top-end bike and the use of modern 1x technology.



WE HATE

The silly stem; 90mm is like riding a road bike.



addict.

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MADISON
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REAL WORLD RIDING

Dan Trent just wants to ride — but life keeps getting in the way



The self-preservation society

There's a common denominator when it comes to risk — you...

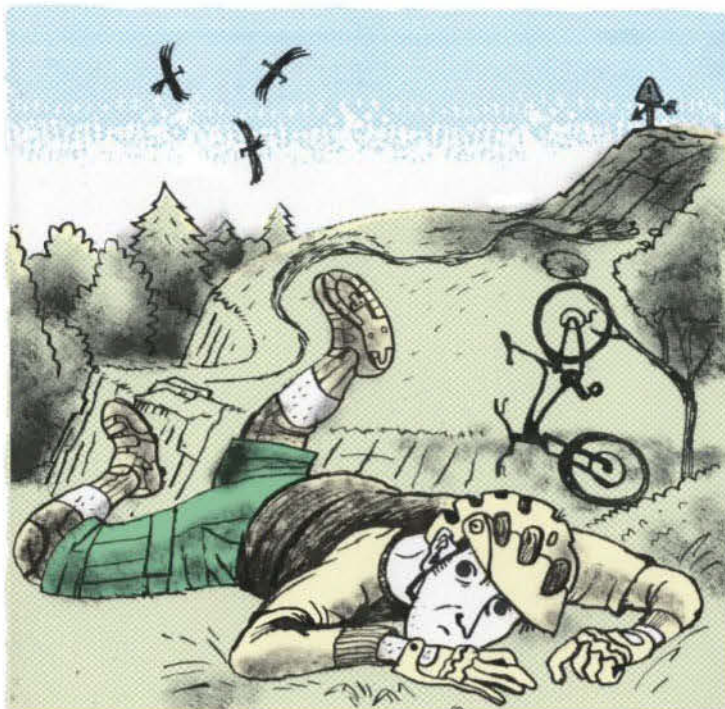
The black vulture cruising a dawn thermal above the famous Sa Calobra road on Majorca's mountainous northern coast probably reckoned he'd spotted an early breakfast pedalling away beneath him. With a couple of hairpins to go, and the route we'd just travelled now a crazy cascade of tarmac below us, we were pretty much at eye-level as he swooped past menacingly. "Not much meat on these bones, pal," I thought, grimacing my way to the crazy over'n'under 270-degree hairpin at the summit on my hired Planet X.

But he wasn't watching me. He was watching the other roadie who'd just come from the opposite direction at a rate of knots. Suddenly, from two or three hairpins below, the sound of a locked tyre sliding across tarmac echoed around the rocky amphitheatre, followed by the hollow clatter of carbon-fibre. And the slap of unprotected, Lycra-clad flesh on rock as I saw the poor chap have one of the biggest shunts I've ever witnessed anyone have. Blimey. So much for skinny tyres being the safe option.

Having established our man was OK — well, conscious, on his feet and not having his bones picked over by said vulture — I pedalled on and mused on what I'd just witnessed. See, one of my justifications for dividing precious riding time between skinny and knobby tyres is the belief that by spending less time on the mountain bike I'd be less likely to crash and do myself the kind of injury that'd leave Junior T hungry and Mrs T working double shifts in an attempt to make up the earnings shortfall.

Mountain biking is as dangerous as you want to make it and a sensible man would just moderate his riding style and take fewer risks on the trails. But I'm not a sensible man, and it's safe to say I have a reputation among my peers for crashing. Crashing hard. And frequently. I honestly don't think I'm completely lacking in skill. I just have a slightly 'have-a-go-hero' approach to risk assessment and tend to get a bit carried away. But you can't put bread on the table with a broken collarbone. And I think I've probably had my money's worth — and then some — out of the NHS.

Working on the logic that road rides rarely throw up dilemmas like 'should I really attempt that new step-up?' it seemed a mature compromise, hence the decision to blow the holiday budget on the rental road bike. Logic shattered



Lying in the scrub, were those **Mallorcan Vultures** circling above me or just **Stars**?

by my comrade in Rapha and his spectacular over-the-bars. Leaving me where? Well there was only one sensible conclusion. If road cycling is just as risky as mountain biking... I may as well just go mountain biking and be done with it. At least I can wear body armour and a full-face on the MTB too. Indeed, if anything the trip to Bike Park Wales and coveted uplift place I booked once back from holiday was the safe and responsible choice.

The complete focus demanded by riding downhill trails at pace was a refreshing rediscovery too. No time to ponder work stresses or the like as there can be on the road. Just absolute mind-emptying dedication to the task at hand and giddy thrill of physical effort and mental planning delivering an almighty adrenaline hit. Pump this, double that, weight the nose for the corner, lift it to

clear that rock step — there's always something to think about on a downhill run and I simply loved getting back in the groove. Things were going well.

Right up to the point where they weren't, in this case about halfway down Wibbly Wobbly. Were those Majorcan vultures circling above my head or just stars? Lying in the scrub beside the trail, shredded flesh zinging to that once familiar throb, I conducted the much-practised system reboot, relieved to find Dainese had mostly done its job and I was in something approaching working order. Gingerly remounting and freewheeling the rest of the trail to rolled eyes, grins and remarks along the lines of "nothing changes, eh?" I truly felt back among my people.

Closet roadie or not, I'm proud to say I can sure as hell still crash like a true mountain biker.



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BORN AGAIN RIDER

After years off the bike, veteran mtb snapper Geoff Waugh has caught the bug again

The day my world fell apart

After the heart attack comes the challenge of recovery — mind and body

March 19, 2012, is a date I will never forget. I won't forget the time either: 11.45am. That was the moment I suffered the heart attack that turned my life upside-down. To be honest, it is not something I have spoken of much because, strangely, in these modern times, doing so still isn't easy.

At the time it happened, I was riding alone on my cross bike, trying to retrace the tracks I had ridden the previous night on an mtb ride. I was hoofing it along in the bottom gear up a very steep hill, out of the saddle and turning each crank over slowly in time with a big shove on the bars.

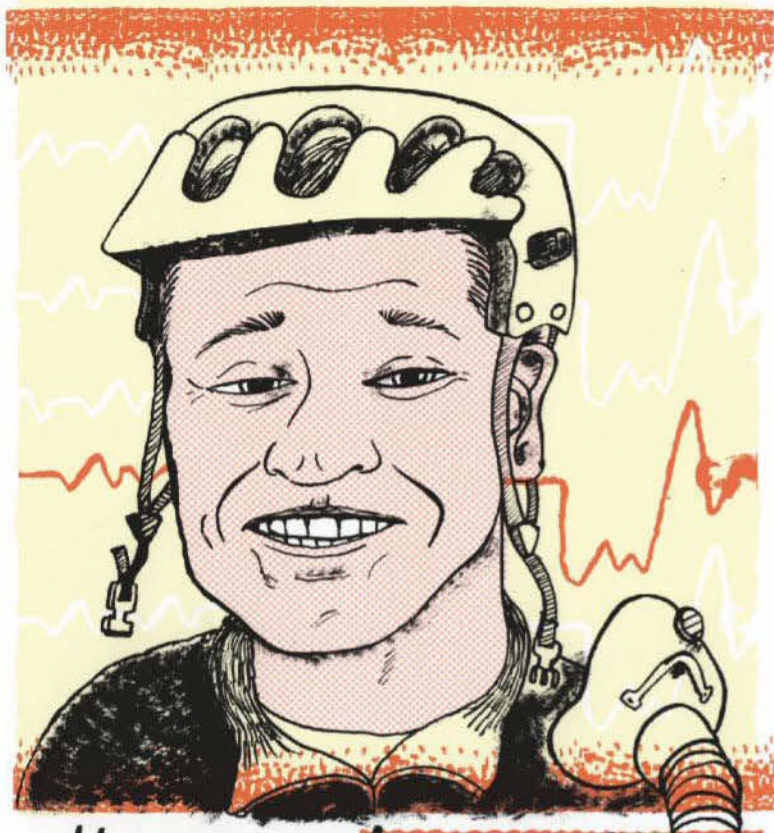
At the crest of the hill, I felt a tightness in my chest. I put it down to a new position on my bike and the drop bars. As I rode home, the feeling worsened enough for me to skip my habitual coffee stop. I leant my bike against my garden fence and my neighbour — who happened to be out on the street — took one look at me, told me to get in his van and drove me at full chat to the hospital. I know this because my EveryTrail app was still active on my phone and recorded speeds in excess of 100mph!

At A&E, they told me what was happening, gave me some morphine and packed me into an ambulance to another hospital, where I watched the doctor thread a stent up my artery into my heart. There I remained for 48 hours before going straight to Costa for a cortado.

Does that sound flippant? Maybe that's because the whole ordeal seemed like a dream sequence from start to finish. I can recall pain but I've had lots of that in the past. Looking back, it doesn't seem as bad as when I dislocated my shoulder photographing a Killer Loop in Shropshire — even if the consequences were very different.

Then there was disbelief: why me? I had considered myself fairly fit. Carrying a few extra pounds, perhaps, but pretty normal. Heart attacks happen to old people who smoke, drink all their lives or have crappy diets... don't they?

I was told my blood pressure and cholesterol were normal and it was probably a genetic thing. I was asked to go to rehabilitation, which involved walking around cones with a group of older patients. I lasted three sessions.



*Having a heart attack
wasn't as painful as
dislocating my shoulder...*

I asked the doctors if I could ride again and the answer was positive — a little bit of exercise would do me good. Trying to explain the intricacies of mountain biking wasn't easy, though. How hard could I push it? The answer was a vague, "judge by feel".

Tentatively, I left my front door and rode, at first with a monitor, hyper-aware of every small niggle in my body, every breath that got caught in my chest. I made sure not to ride too far from civilisation and carried my phone. It felt good and crap simultaneously. One of the prescribed drugs slows and governs the heart rate, and I was told I would never achieve as high a heart rate as before. Sprinting or hard efforts are

ridiculous — but that might change.

Two years later, just as I was beginning to get a grip, veteran mountain bike journalist and close friend Steve Worland left us, following a heart attack. I went to his funeral. On the drive back, a huge depression hit me. It bit hard enough to put me off doing anything really, let alone riding. I was caught in a Catch-22, where I knew riding was beneficial but it was the last thing I fancied doing.

Eventually I made the effort, got back on, and on a decent descent forgot everything and enjoyed it just as much as ever, puffing away and smiling like an idiot. It's such a mind game, but one I intend to win.





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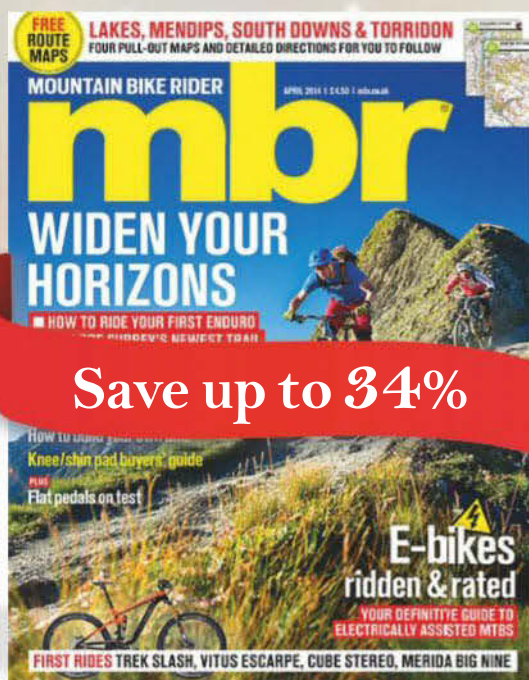
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Janet Coulson, Chris Davison, Roo Fowler, Mick
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PUBLISHING

Publishing director: Keith Foster (020 8726 8402)

PA to publishing director:

Martine Derwish (020 8726 8405)

Senior marketing executive: Natalie Hicks
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MD (Inspire): Paul Williams

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★ STAR LETTER ★

MTB SAVES THE DAY

I bike to work, or to the train station at least, and I normally use my road bike. Quick, easy, minimal fuss. But at the beginning of August I was knocked off my road bike, thus rendering it unusable, while it sits in the bike shop and the insurance companies argue out the details.

In comes the saviour: the mountain bike. My 2011 Specialized Stumpjumper FSR doesn't see much action, just the occasional weekend when the lads meet up, or the eagerly awaited weekend in Wales. Not that I don't want to ride it — just with a young family it's finding the time to use it. But it is amazing how much fun you can have, deviating from your usual route to and from work. All those little shortcuts you used to take as a kid on your first (t)rusty old Apollo come rushing back.

There's not much excitement on a ride through Ipswich in all honesty, but those stairs you ride round on your road bike, you breeze down on your mtb, before bunny hopping the next curb, riding up the grass verge and shooting over the little grass hill (while secretly imagining you're Gee Atherton), trying to pull that little tiny whip out of the bag you know you haven't mastered yet.

With the road bike now on the way to being fixed, I'm not sure



I want it fixed anymore. Maybe a new investment in some SPD pedals and shoes to give me the extra power and we could have the answer....

Josh Brooke

Ed — As you've found out, the versatility of the mountain bike is one of its greatest assets. And as you've also found, you don't even need mountains to get your off-road fix.

PEAK PRACTICE

I'm responsible for the Keeper of the Peak Twitter (@KoftheP), a Twitter feed for riders in the Peak District. We share live(ish) trail updates to help plan rides and protect the Peaks from damage. It's been going for about 18 months and we're just shy of 1,000 followers — we've even won an award for good use of social media.

The feed works simply: riders ride, tweet where they've been and the condition of the trail to @KoftheP, and we retweet it. It's pretty much traffic news for the Peak, but has been picked up quite well. Is it something mbr would be interested in?

The Keeper of the Peak

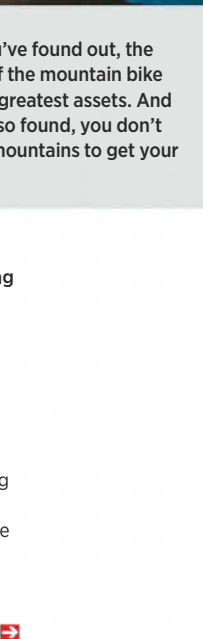
Ed — sounds like a great idea to us. Tailoring your ride according to the conditions not only minimises damage, it maximises fun. Everyone's a winner!

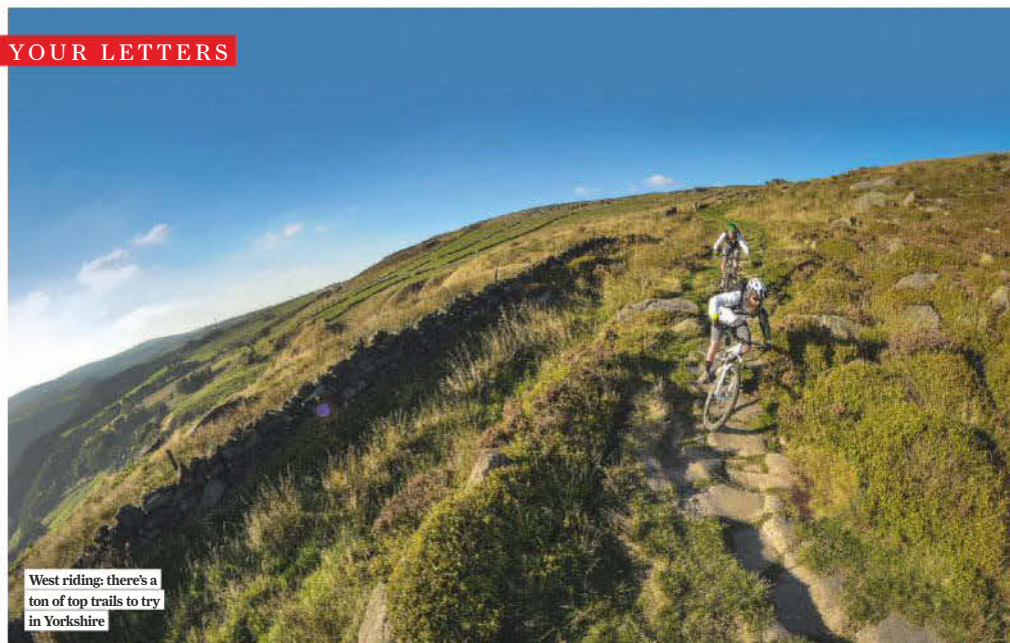
MORE TO LEARN

I've just received my copy of the November issue. I feel a bit disappointed with the technical content. The procedure of bleeding brakes is almost identical to the previous year. Surely there's more to cover repair-wise than just Avid brakes?

If you are doing a repeat then how about the procedure for a different brand?

Chris ➡





Ed — Our thinking is, there are thousands of bikes out there with Avid brakes and some of them can be problematic, so it's worth updating the bleed procedure fairly regularly in case some readers have missed it. We covered the current Shimano brake bleed procedure back in December 2011, but Formula would be another popular brand with lots of OEM spec worth featuring.

MAP MY RIDE

I really enjoyed reading your feature on the classic rides of West Yorkshire in your October edition, but I was disappointed not to find any maps of the suggested routes.

Any chance you can point me in the direction of a route map?

Pete

Ed — Certainly Pete. You can download a GPS route file from: po.st/WestYorksBest

WHAT BIKE TO BUY

I have a budget of €1,500 and am looking for an all mountain/burly trail bike as I have my race bike for more mellow trails. I'm looking for a bike that can handle abuse and go fast downhill, but also be able to ride uphill again and on some flatter trail centre trails etc.

Cian May (Ireland)

Ed — The clear winner in our recent £1,200 trail bike test was the Canyon Nerve Al 6.0, but with an extra 20mm of travel, the burlier Vitus Escarpe 275 VR sounds like the bike for you. Earning 9/10 and the runner-up spot, it's a cracking bike for £1,199.

A WINNING FORMULA

Love the magazine and look forward to it landing on my doormat every month! One thing I've noticed in various reviews is that Formula brakes get a bit of a panning for one reason or another.

I have Formula R1 brakes on my mountain bike and absolutely love them. As I was coming down some steep singletrack at the weekend and finding that lovely sweet-



spot between wheel rotation and lock-up, I wondered how a brake could be better; certainly no juddering, poor modulation or other nasties for me!

Maybe I've been lucky but I love my brakes and wanted to leap to Formula's defence and give them a big thumbs up! Top marks from me!

Kev Hosking

Ed — Glad you like your Formulas. And as with all reviews, ultimately if you're happy with the performance, that's the only thing that matters.

WINTER ROLLERS

After reading your summer trail tyre test earlier this year I went and bought a High Roller II for the front and kept my Maxxis Aspen on the back. It worked well all summer, even though the High Roller is 2.4in which is maybe a bit wide for my less aggressive riding. I've started thinking what to use once autumn/winter arrives and it's going to be wet and muddy.

Any tips for choosing winter tyres. Perhaps winter tyre test coming up?

Martin

Ed — You read our mind. A winter tyre test is slated for next month's issue. In the meantime, we recommend the Maxxis Beaver and Specialized Storm Control. Both are great mud tyres yet work in drier conditions.

QUICK LINES

SNAP HAPPY

Your bike tests are always accompanied by great photos, usually by Roo Fowler. These obviously need a good deal of thought to set up and capture so how about an article covering how it's done, time taken, number of shots taken, etc, etc? I for one would be greatly interested!

Mike Watson

Ed — Roo might be a little cautious of giving away his trade secrets, but it's an idea definitely worth considering. Mostly, photoshoots involve lots of patience and repeated use of the phrase 'just one more time'.

OLD BLOKES

WHO SHOULD KNOW BETTER

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WHO: Craig Needs **WHERE:** Clwydians North Wales **WHEN:** September 2014 **HOW:** Pedal body axle went into my leg



WHO: Jane Elliston **WHERE:** Downs Link, Surrey **WHEN:** September 2014 **HOW:** A mile from home, 30 completed, skidded on some gravel



WHO: Jamie Wilson **WHERE:** Portland, Dorset **WHEN:** August 2014 **HOW:** Bad landing after jump, unconscious for two minutes. Don't use Portland stone to cushion your face plant!



WHO: mbr art editor Ben Smith **WHERE:** Surrey **WHEN:** September 2014 **HOW:** Saw the massive tree in front of me last minute, so jumped into the branches and came away with a new piercing.



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THE BIG QUESTION

Every day, **mbr**'s forum is awash with advice, stories and gossip. Here's what you've been talking about this month.

Has watching Red Bull Rampage inspired you to push your limits, or made you more tentative?

I watch that sort of stuff because it is entertaining and occasionally exciting edge-of-the-seat stuff. But those riders are so far above my level that it doesn't inspire me at all; I just gasp in amazement, shake my head, and slowly walk away.

Steve Sordy

Red Bull Rampage and other such events are IMHO purely TV events... just like TV violence and the likes... I'll watch it, feel the vibe, then carry on as usual. If I aspired to be a death-defying rider, I'd end up injuring myself so badly that I'd have to be off work for longer than my bank manager would approve of...

DISGreece

You remember Danny Hart's Worlds run at Champéry in 2011, and Rob Warner was saying "How does he sit down with balls that big?" Well Andreu Lacondeguy must have to tow his behind him in a trailer. His run was crackers.

NorthernMatt

Merely a stunt show. And not mountain biking as I know it. All very exciting, but it's exhibitionism and nothing more.

Ronzo73

Love watching Red Bull Rampage, it's very entertaining and a good opportunity to see riders at the top of their game. I can relate to it and I do find it inspiring. It helps me push myself more on local trails and on new trails. It's all about progression and we should all be pushing ourselves more and more, to get better at what we enjoy doing. Otherwise, why bother?

Waspfactory191

What is inspiring about Rampage is the way those riders pick themselves up, dust themselves off, ride out the crazy-ass massive jumps and then do it over again.

Revolution

NEXT MONTH

WHAT ARE YOUR MTB-RELATED HIGHLIGHTS AND LOWLIGHTS OF 2014?

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01



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02



BIKE LOVE



03



04



05

01 13-year old Fraser Watt makes mincemeat of Rothiemurchus Estate near Aviemore. Who needs Canada with trails like that?
Photo: Willie Watt

02 Lost in translation; a Lapierre X-Flow somewhere above Rhayader in Mid-Wales.
Photo: James Diston

03 La dolce vita: Justin Carrick high above Lake Garda in Italy.
Photo: Michael Shiel

04 Walking with wheels. About to summit Nan Bield with Haweswater in the distance.
Photo: Robin Woodburn

05 Chris Greenfell and his Yeti SB66 about to enjoy Dunnyat's unseasonably dusty descents.
Photo: Chris Greenfell

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LONG MYND, SHROPSHIRE

The Long Mynd's reclusive singletrack is easy to miss, but hard to forget once you've sampled the high-octane descent of Minton Batch

Words & photos: Seb Rogers





M

eandering through Shropshire on the A49, cutting a swathe in the strip of rural backcountry that separates England from Wales, you don't get much warning of the Long Mynd's impending arrival. For several miles it's a distant smudge — an aberration on an otherwise surprisingly flat(ish) horizon. Barely seven miles long and three wide and meaning, literally, 'long mountain', it becomes a bigger presence as you approach the turning for Church Stretton.

Even then, though, it's one of those places that seems a little diminished when you're up close to it. Hidden behind the tea shops, chintz and day trippers, it's hard to imagine that there's much here to delay anyone other than the blue-rinse brigade and coach loads of school geography field trippers.

Appearances can be deceptive, of course. The distant view of the Mynd is the one that gives the best idea of its potential — a geological zit on the landscape, the result of millions of years of continental plate shifts (the hills began life at around the same latitude as the Falkland Islands) and volcanic activity. Compressed into this compact, mini-Alpine landscape is some of the best natural singletrack around. But it does come with a caveat: you have to seek it out. 📍

ABOUT THIS SERIES

We're making it our mission to reveal Britain's finest singletrack. We want to celebrate all the wonderful natural riding hidden across the land, the trails that formed by evolution rather than design, with no little wooden posts and colour-coded signs to guide you round. Real, honest singletrack. Believe it or not, there are trails out there that ride like they are purpose-built for mountain bikes, yet in fact they are completely uncontrived; the haphazard products of chance. Discovering these miracles of nature brings the kind of wholesome reward that trail centres can never replicate.

Our list of ultimate singletrack stretches from north to south, east to west. It crosses both Scottish and Welsh borders and touches on

many of the UK's national parks. Among our selection are pocket-sized rides around intense networks of trail and sprawling epics that will take all day to complete. In every case they represent many of the most memorable rides we have experienced in our riding lives so far.

This is not, however, a definitive roll call. Like the trails themselves, we want to see this list evolve. With your input it can be honed and refined. So, if you know of any singletrack that is good enough to rank alongside national treasures such as Bowderdale in the Howgills, the Doethie Valley in Mid Wales and Minton Batch on the Long Mynd, we'd love to hear about it. Get in touch via mbr@timeinc.com or tweet @mbrmagazine #britainsbestsingletrack.

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Matt Simmonds
renews his glider
club membership

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

I know this because I've been here before, many times. I started coming here when I was working in Birmingham, back in the mid-'90s. Cannock Chase was just a bunch of hilly gravel tracks back then, trail centres hadn't been invented and Wales was simply too far to travel in a clapped out old hatchback on a day off. The Long Mynd was a little slice of high speed, Scalextric-esque fun in a world that had, for the most part, yet to discover the delights of singletrack.

It's become one of my favourite places to ride, anywhere in the UK. And that's a slightly odd thing. Because I know perfectly well that, though the quality of singletrack here is very good, the quantity is, by most riders' standards, underwhelming. Put simply, there's not very much here, in terms of sheer distance. That might not sound like much of a recommendation, but bear with me. This is old-school singletrack, and the whole point of it is that its scarcity adds to the intensity of the experience. You've got to earn the thrills, but if you're willing to put in the effort, the reward is there for the taking.

The problem is this: we've all become used to the fairground appeal of trail centres, where adrenaline is served up in neat, bite-sized and risk-assessed chunks which are designed to flow seamlessly into a rollercoaster-sized, easily digestible whole. The Long Mynd — like much of the real world beyond trail centres — isn't like that. The climbs can be long and dull. The bits that connect the singletrack can be, er, long and dull. There isn't, in all fairness, a great deal to get excited about, in riding terms, outside the scope of the singletrack.

Except for the view. The view from much of the trail running the length of the Mynd's spine is epic in scope, rather like being in the middle of a 19th century painting depicting the essential greenness and pleasantness of rural England — a bucolic patchwork quilt of fields, hedges, trees and the occasional farm. It's something to look at while you're counting out the pedal revolutions to

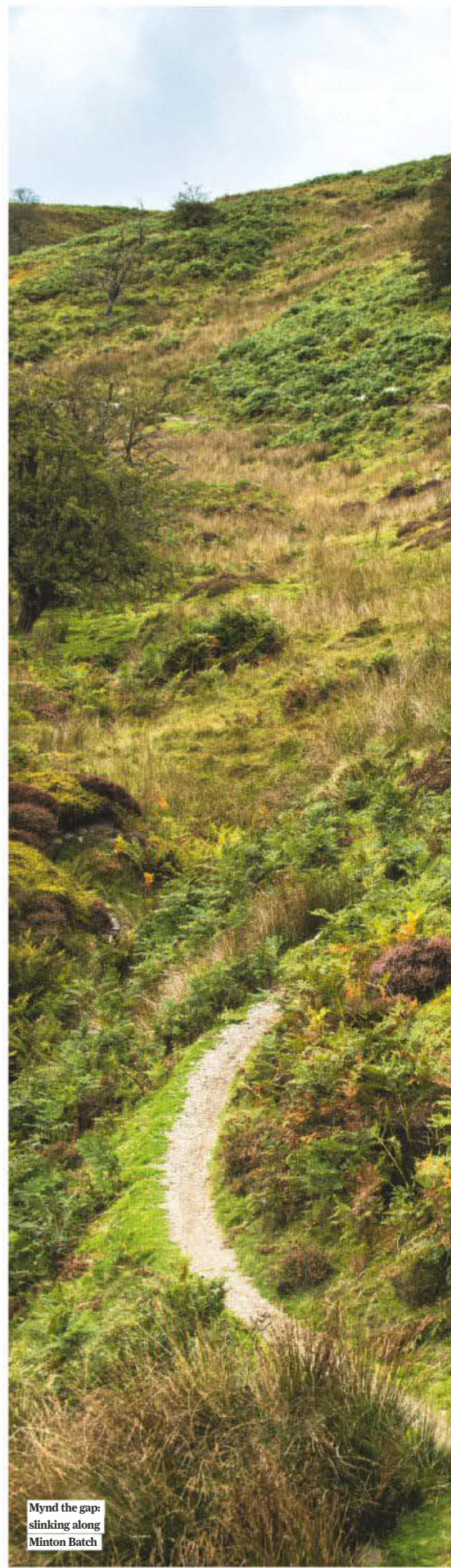
The view from much of the trail running the length of the Mynd's spine is epic in scope

the next singletrack descent, and a very pleasant distraction it is too.

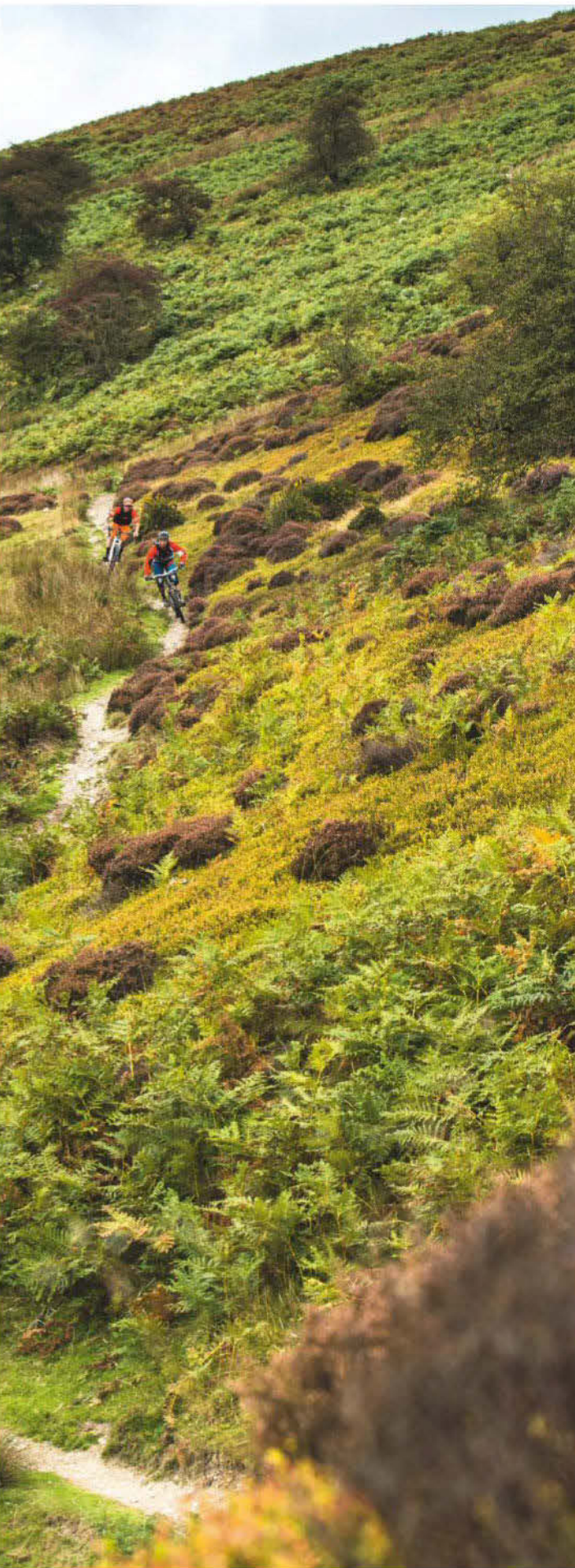
Knowing the hills fairly well, as I do, it's tempting to cut to the chase and just blast down my favourite descent and then, probably, do it all again. And again. Because it really is that good. But, like a lot of the better things in life, I've learnt that a bit of delayed gratification isn't such a bad thing, once in a while. And so we — by which I mean local guide and bike shop manager Will Chambers and Shropshire lad and Saracen team rider Matt Simmonds — ride straight past the start of this humdinger of a piece of singletrack, spinning past the gliding club up onto the ridge that runs the length of the Mynd.

WHAT GOES UP

There are various ways to slice up a Long Mynd ride, but for my money you're not getting the best out of it unless you start — and finish — at the bottom of the hill. By starting at Will's shop at the southern end we've given ourselves an easy spin up forest fire roads to the outer reaches of the gliding club, which is worth seeking out anyway — partly for the views towards Wales, which are astonishing on a clear day, and partly to view the gliders being hoiked into the air by a motor-driven bungee on a winch. A word to the wise: don't ride over the cable, at least not without checking whether there's a glider on the other end first. ➡



Mynd the gap:
slinking along
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The continuation of the ridge-top bridleway is a contentious issue, locally. A two-metre wide, smooth gravel track might not seem a likely focus for disagreement, but it's precisely those characteristics — uniform width and smoothness — that have split opinion. On the one hand, it's replaced the old stony, rutted and washed-out surface with one that's a bit more weatherproof and accessible to more people. On the other, it's a bit... well, dull. Y'know, smooth and wide. Yawn.

But that's OK, because smooth gravel is easily dispatched, particularly with a tailwind. It's only a few short minutes of big ring pedal-mashing before we're at the top of our first descent. This one — which drops into the tourist honey-pot of Carding Mill Valley, complete with tea shop and the obligatory car park full of coaches — has been sanitised too. The good news is that it can be insanely fast, has a section of unsanitisable, sphincter-narrowing rock garden in the middle of it, and did I mention how fast it is? The bad news is that, on most days, you can't ride it anywhere near as fast as it deserves because of the coach-loads of walkers looking at the view. Top tip: ride here very early in the morning, or late in the evening. It's worth the effort.

The upside to the presence of all the day-trippers is, of course, the tea shop. It'd be rude to pass up the opportunity of soup, sandwiches, coffee and cake and, being well brought up, we make sure to pop in and avail ourselves. The other option is to trundle down the road into Church Stretton, but that seems like a bit too much effort when the cakes are practically jumping off the counter at us.

We have, of course, ignored the reality that we're pretty much at the bottom of the hill. The next bit is a gorgeous section of singletrack clinging to the hillside, contouring up through the



early autumn colours of the bracken. Shame it's uphill, but there you go. Up past the golf course, climbing past the bunkers and fairways and barrelling down into another of the miniature valleys that punctuate the Mynd ridgeline, lunch is soon a distant memory. More singletrack zig-zags its way out of the valley, spitting us out on the road that heads inexorably back up towards the ridge. We winch past the wild ponies, eyeing up the tempting-looking footpaths — that we're not allowed to ride, natch — dropping into the valleys to our left.

BLASTING THE BATCH

This isn't too much of a hardship, though, because we've saved the best for last. That favourite descent of mine? It's called Minton Batch and, if you've

NARROW-MINDED

The textbook definition of singletrack is a trail no more than 18 inches wide, the stuff that arcs gracefully through a Swiss Alpine meadow or a redwood forest thick with loam. To restrict Britain's best singletrack to such anorexic dimensions, however, is to ostracise some frankly brilliant riding. As a consequence, for the purposes of this series, we're defining 'singletrack' as any trail wide enough for only one bike to pass along at a time.

Preserving these national treasures is everyone's responsibility. In order to keep Britain's singletrack single, stay on the trail as much as possible — which means riding through puddles and boggy sections, rather than around them. And if it's really been hammering down for days on end, maybe avoid riding these delicate ribbons of perfection altogether.

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MORE THAN A BRAND, A NAME

It's worth the trip here just for this kilometre or two of unspoilt, narrow and twisty trail

Small but perfectly formed: Long Mynd in a nutshell

not ridden it, it's one that you definitely need to try. It's worth the trip here just for this kilometre or two of unspoilt, narrow, twisty and very definitely not groomed or risk-assessed trail.

Are there faster descents? Undoubtedly. Longer? Well, obviously. More technical? Of course. Minton Batch doesn't, by itself, set any new standards or push the abilities of a good trail rider especially hard. But trying to measure it against other singletrack descents, elsewhere, misses the point. Because what's special about it is that it flows into a fast, seamless whole that delivers a few minutes of huge fun... by accident. No-one designed this trail. It wasn't built for bikes. It's just here, in a secluded Long Mynd valley that doesn't go anywhere other than a slightly delapidated, run-down farm.

And it's for all those reasons that it's so great. We feed into the top section past the easy-to-miss signpost and pick up the narrow, sinuous curve of dirt that marks the finale of our ride. The boggy section that used to be an energy-sucking, bike-splattering mess has been covered with boardwalk, which is nice. And that's the only sign of human intervention. Past a rock outcrop that betrays the geological underpinnings of the hills we've been riding, the valley that makes up Minton Batch starts to become better defined at this point. If we had time to look — which we don't — we'd be able to see the stream to our right. But we're too busy chasing each other down the trail as it clings to the left-hand side of the batch, roughly following the contours in a way that naturally adds interest by way of corners, dips and hollows. A trail-builder couldn't have done a better job, frankly.

Past the stunted tree halfway down there's a drop over an exposed root, then the speed picks up as the trail fades and we're into a free-for-all



Proof that Mother Nature makes a pretty good trail-builder

through a boulder field of embedded baby heads. Will gaps the next stream crossing — an advantage of knowing the trail so well — while Matt and I manual through it. We're into the final section. Past the tree plantation to the right, the trail runs flat, fast and twisty. Sheep scatter as we big-ring it into the farmyard at the bottom wearing grins big enough to split our faces in two. Even Will, who's ridden this descent more times than he'd probably care to remember. It's that good.

How many drivers on the A49 would guess there's this much fun to be had in the hills they're driving past? Not many. Sometimes you get out what you put in. [bbc.com/news/health-55555555](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-55555555)

Download the route for free at po.st/mynd

MY BACKYARD... WILL CHAMBERS

"I've been riding the Long Mynd for 15 years. I love the expanse of open hillside with the great views, and the feeling that I'm not cooped up in the woods. The tracks are fast — it's better in the evening when it's quiet, though. Minton Batch is the best descent in the area — it's over three kilometres of fast singletrack and you hardly ever find walkers down there. Carding Mill Valley in the evening is a good blast too, but at other times of day there are too many tourists around to make it worthwhile. If I'm not riding here I like to keep it local and go up to Hopton Woods. Shropshire's got a bit of everything for whatever riding you're into so there's no need to go anywhere else!"

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SUN, SEA & SINGLETRACK

Four hours travelling in the UK can guarantee you some amazing riding, but hop on a plane and you can throw blazing sunshine into the bargain, not to mention the glorious trails of Spain's Bay of Biscay

Words: Pete Scullion Photos: Sam Needham





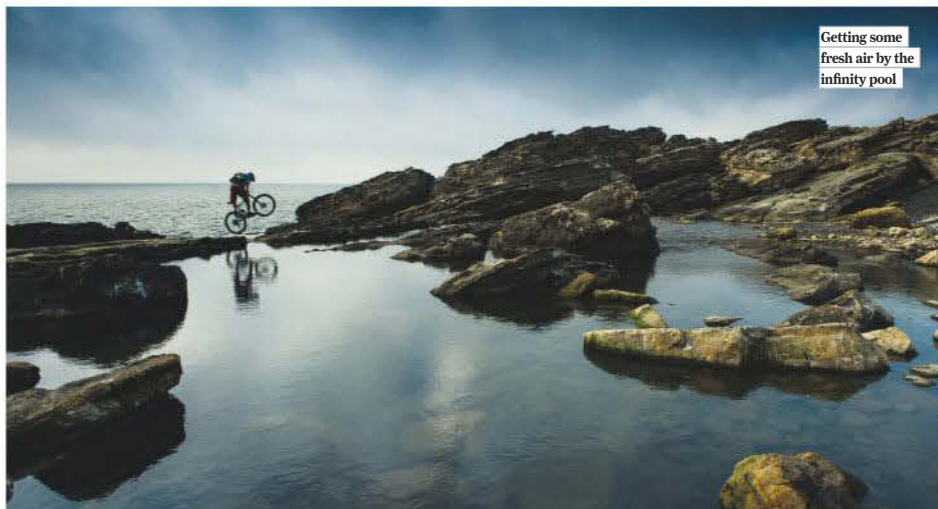


Atlantic motion:
Joe surfs the cliff-top
against a setting sun

The Basque Country might not be top of everyone's list for a sunny riding holiday, but it should be. Three hours from Manchester will see you in Bilbao, rather than the Scottish Borders or South Wales, and the air will be considerably hotter. A further hour from the airport will take you to the bustling port of San Sebastián, where one quick water taxi from the old town will see you atop some impressive sea cliffs

with a sublime ribbon of dust running for miles ahead of you. This well-worn path hugs the coast as the cliffs rise and fall into the many inlets and bays, running along most of the northern coast of the Iberian peninsula and making for some superb bike riding.

Of course, a few hours' travel can sound considerably easier in theory than it is in practice. The reality of stepping onto Spanish tarmac was that my body was still hurting from the sleep I'd snatched in the boot of the car atop my bike box on the way to Manchester airport, and the scorching sun I'd been seeking suddenly didn't seem so welcome after all. In just over four hours I had been transported from that less-than-comfortable slumber, and a typically rainy British morning, to the baking heat of the Basque Country. We'd only had our feet on the ground for an hour, but the early start and a speedy breakfast in the departure lounge already seemed like a distant memory. Now the more pressing matter was



Getting some
fresh air by the
infinity pool

MY EYES, UNFAMILIAR WITH SUN OF THIS STRENGTH, TOOK TIME TO ADJUST TO THE BRIGHTNESS

trying to find space for our bike boxes aboard the coach to San Sebastián.

Before long we were hauling those heavy cardboard boxes onto the pavement at the bus terminal, thankfully shaded by the high canopy of sycamore trees that lines the streets of the town. Almost on cue, the BasqueMTB van pulled up, handshakes were exchanged, bikes and kit were launched into the back of the van and we were off to find our first ride of the trip. With no real

concept of where we were or where we were going, I kept my eyes fixed on the window, trying to take as much in as possible. My eyes, unfamiliar with sun of this strength, took their time to adjust to the unfettered brightness. As we wound our way through the streets, dodging erratic drivers on the crowded roads, heat and unfamiliar smells filled the air. We were a long way from the morning's scent of fresh rain on tarmac; we reassembled our bikes in a large, open courtyard, taking the



opportunity to sample some pinxtos (Basque tapas) at the same time.

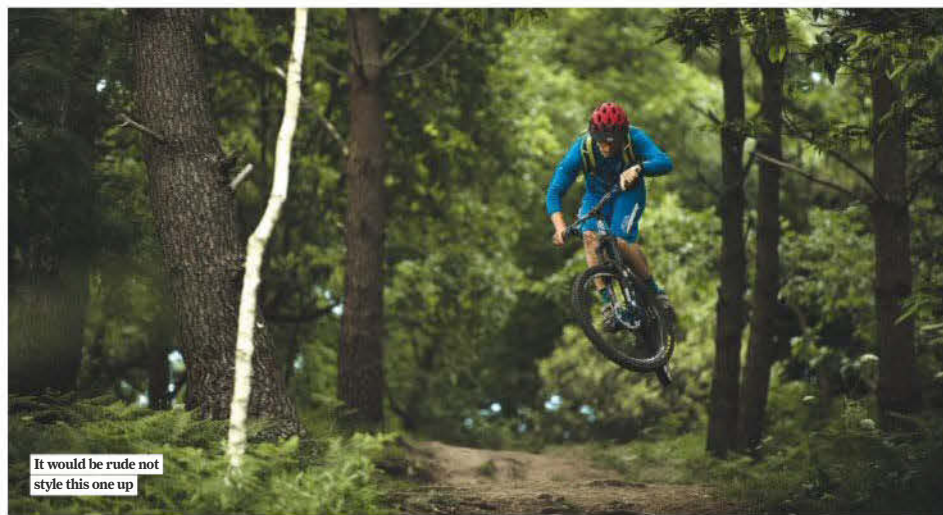
With bikes assembled, we cruised through the streets of San Sebastián's port, passing the huge metal smelter at the shore as we made our way into the older streets. Old stone walls closed in, almost claustrophobically, before we reached the water taxi that would take us across the inlet. Passing bikes over the gap between the small fishing boat and the pontoon, my less than long legs were struggling already. Falling in would have been nothing short of embarrassing, even if the water below looked fairly inviting. Across the bay, we started on a long, steep climb to where the singletrack would begin in earnest.

CAT AND MOUSE

Leaving the roasting hot tarmac and tall sycamores behind, we were now whipping along wet, sandy singletrack under the shade of pines overhead. The smells of the hot forest air were all around us, while a carpet of pine needles deadened the sound of our tyres. With our legs now warmed up from the stiff climb and a fast cruise through the woods, we were quickly at the start of the good stuff. There was a fair drop to our right, but the cool ocean breeze did a superb job of taking the worst of the sun and we could turn our full attention to maximum attack.


Before long it was a game of cat and mouse. Each rider was trying to get as much wind as possible between themselves and the rider behind, while keeping the rider out front in check. Leading the charge was Joe Flanagan, making everything look a bit too easy, seemingly oblivious to the sheer drop a verge's distance from his driveside crank. Intrepid snapper Sam Needham was hot on Joe's

A CARPET OF PINE NEEDLES DEADENED THE SOUND OF OUR TYRES



It would be rude not
style this one up

heels, matching his speed if not his control. But the Needham freight train rolled on regardless while our host and guide Doug MacDonald kept his lurid Orbea in sight of the leading pair. An ailing freehub meant I'd need to make my own fun, while trying not to get dropped completely.

Soon we were out of the trees and back under the relentless heat of the sun, but that was a secondary concern. The initial mile or so of the trail is well-trodden, meaning a fairly loose surface where erosion has been fixed. Numerous switchbacks snaked their way down the side of the first cove as we headed west, each trying to keep our front wheels in check on the unpredictable surface. I spotted the numerous lines of the three that had gone before me and none of them looked right, the cinder dust clearly getting the better of each of them. With the switchbacks behind us, the trail opened out as it traversed, allowing some serious speed made all the more exciting by the 



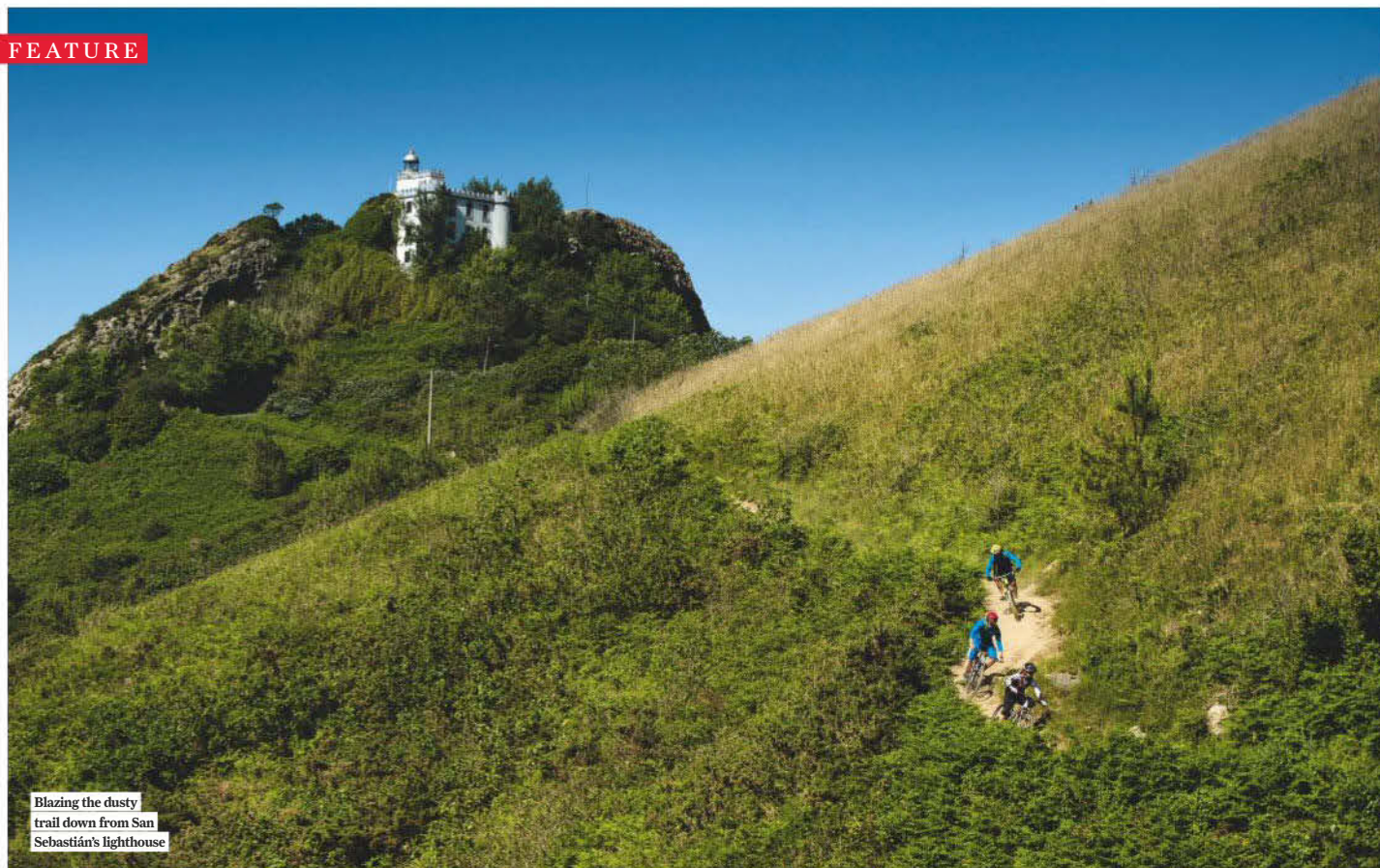
Black, white and rad all over: Pete rips it up on the coast of Spain



Doug's getting sick before he's even turned a pedal



Doug takes the quick route to the taxi bank



Blazing the dusty trail down from San Sebastián's lighthouse

fact we were riding blind. Tall grass flanked either side of the trail, meaning that looking far ahead wasn't always an option.

Back into the trees, the trail flattened off and we were soon atop an old aqueduct that followed most of the path around the cliffs. Up and over again, we were soon back charging hard down the singletrack, the occasional scuff of a locked wheel giving warning of something interesting ahead. Dropping down into another cove, wider and deeper this time, the bamboo surrounding us seemed out of place but at least offered some welcome shade.


A steep, narrow natural staircase led out of the cove and we had bikes on our backs for the first and only time. The slightly slower pace allowed us to scope lines for the return journey. Back atop the cliffs again, the Bay of Biscay seemed to go on forever, and the singletrack appeared equally never-ending. Into the woods again, now broadleaf, along a much steeper hillside, the smiles started to come thick and fast as the trail encouraged the finding of a second downslope for some extra points. Double drops and perfectly angled large rocks littered the lengthy descent. Cat and mouse was abandoned as everyone took a clear run that ended in a shallow left-hander with supreme exposure. Down and down we went, the Basque walkers allowing us through, cheering us on as the dust kicked off our back wheels.

Another long drop into a small inlet, and more sublime, dusty singletrack brought us to a natural infinity pool beneath a waterfall that was as tricky to ride across as it was beautiful. We took a moment to admire the perfect reflections, then cracked on across open pasture. Trees seemed a world away, cows and sheep keeping the larger vegetation back, the ground rocket-sled fast. Long, shallow turns wound their way across

BACK ATOP THE CLIFFS, THE BAY OF BISCAY SEEMED TO GO ON FOREVER

the contours, and at no point were they severe enough to force us to back off the power. A thin layer of dust was the only thing between tyre and considerable grip.

The last few miles were covered at a ferocious pace, the contours more consistent, allowing all our horsepower to be deployed. The light was beginning to fade, and it was time to retrace our steps, albeit with a few diversions along the way. We pushed the limit of grip and control on some wide tracks littered with small jumps that were just like the trails we cut our teeth on many moons ago. All the tricky climbs on the outward leg now offered new challenges in the opposite direction; the pace still high as nobody wanted to be last back to the van. To be honest though, we didn't want to be back at the van — that ride could and should have lasted forever!

So next time you're exploring your options for a bike trip away, from London to South Wales or Manchester to the Scottish Borders, remember you could be enjoying far more than just great trails in the same time. Everyone loves a good local ride, but there's something truly special about the sun, the dust, the Atlantic breeze and the Basque pace of life. Trust me, and try it for yourself. 



A body shift helps to thread the needle



Happy as sand boys: larking about on the beach at last

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Leap of faith

Not wanting to spend all his time driving to trail centres, Garry Harding decided to create his own close to home. We took a trip to Devon to sample this grand design

Words: Russ Speller Pictures: Chris Davison

It's a fortunate few that don't have to endure seemingly endless roads en route to their nearest trail centre. With incomes squeezed and fuel costs increasingly prohibitive, these regional meccas are becoming frustratingly out of reach. One solution is to build your own. OK, so it's a fairly extreme solution, but it didn't stop one man trying.

That man is Garry Harding, the catalyst behind the new trails being developed at Keypitts Farm, near Ilfracombe in North Devon. We travelled west to find out what this trailblazer and his core group of volunteers have achieved in the 14 months since the project began.

Just arriving at Keypitts we couldn't help but be impressed.

Our eyes were immediately drawn to a single rider, barely discernible, taking on the zig-zagging trail descending the opposing side of the valley. The feeling of scale, and the potential of the landscape we'd be riding in was overwhelming, and with Exmoor looming at the end of the valley, and South Wales in the haze across the Bristol Channel, you really couldn't ask for a better backdrop. The only question was: would this be akin to a traditional trail centre, or something entirely different?

Discussing the motivation that kick-starts an ambitious project like this began as soon as we rolled on to the 'Pigshed' (a steady climb with a few rollable jumps and fun catch berms). Harding explained how he hadn't even looked at a bike until 2011. In a mixed Brummie/West Country accent, he recounted how he gave up work as a lorry driver to look after his wife — her health had deteriorated and she required full-time care. It was at about this time that a couple of local friends had encouraged him to throw a leg over a mountain bike to keep his fitness, and his sanity. By the bottom of the first descent, he was hooked. But after seeing more restrictions on the use of local trails, with priority given to horses and ramblers, and after undertaking a revelatory 120-mile round trip to Haldon Forest Park (a trail centre on the outskirts of Exeter), Harding found himself motivated to bring this dedicated type of trail to North Devon. The only questions were how and where to do it.

FINDING THE SITE

Harding contacted the 1 South West project, a Defra-funded programme that brought improvements to Ashton Court and notably built the respected new trail centres at Cardinham and Lanhydrock, Cornwall. "Leading the project was Paul Hawkins and he offered me the best possible advice. With plenty of riders locally, not to mention a huge tourist trade coming into the area in the summer, there was more than enough potential to justify a proper trail centre," he explained.

Finding land was a fundamental problem for Harding, having no links to local landowners. "I contacted local property owners who may have suitable land. Asking the local council for help, I found they were less than supportive.

"I'd bombarded local councillor Brian Greenslade with emails, having seen him patting himself on the back for getting the Tour of Britain

to start in Barnstaple. I was eventually offered a list of landowners that I'd already found and a fee of £190 for any further information."

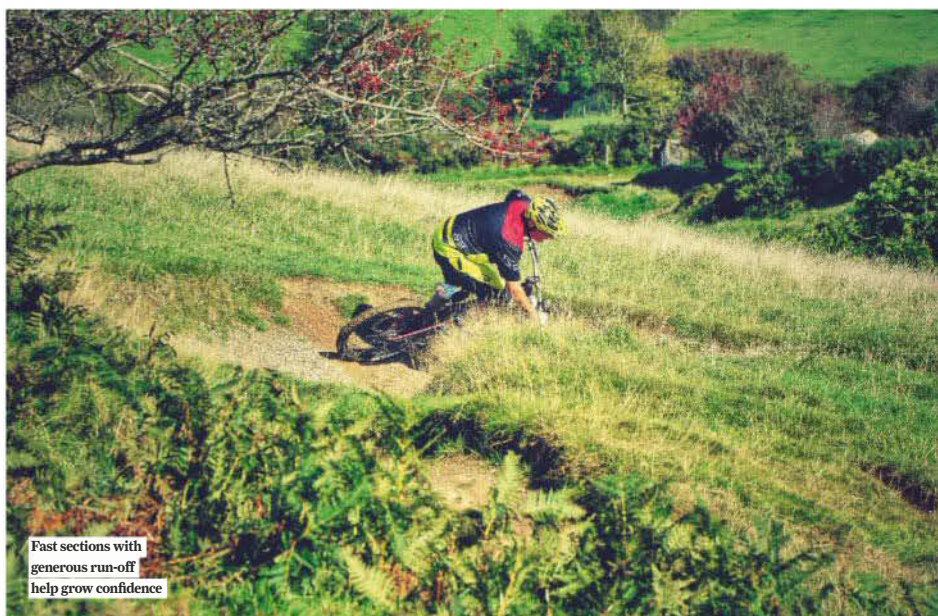
Undeterred, Harding researched the restrictions he was likely to come across, learning that an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty must not be scarred by any development visible from satellite, and so found himself looking on Google Earth. "I came across a small piece of land at a place called Keypitts Stables and Quads — this place was already scarred by existing trails. I knew this was a bonus for planning, and thought this could be the place if I could get the landowner interested."

Farm owners Fred and Wendy Chugg agreed a meeting with Harding and he put forward his idea. "Fred and Wendy were great. They are environmentally conscious and run their 200-acre farm using renewable energy where possible, and also manufacture their own electric quad bikes. They were very positive and willing to give mountain biking — a low-cost and environmentally low-impact activity — a go."

Within two months of planning being submitted, and with the support of the Chugg family, the Keypitts mountain bike trails project was rubber-stamped and it was time to break ground and get building.

At the top of the valley, above a trail known simply as the 'Angry Badger', we had to ask about previous trail-building experience. "Trail-building experience? What's that?" replied Harding. "We put the word out for help with the design and build, but very few turned up and gave any input. ➔

HARDING HADN'T LOOKED AT A BIKE UNTIL 2011, WHEN HE STARTING RIDING TO KEEP FIT, AND SANE





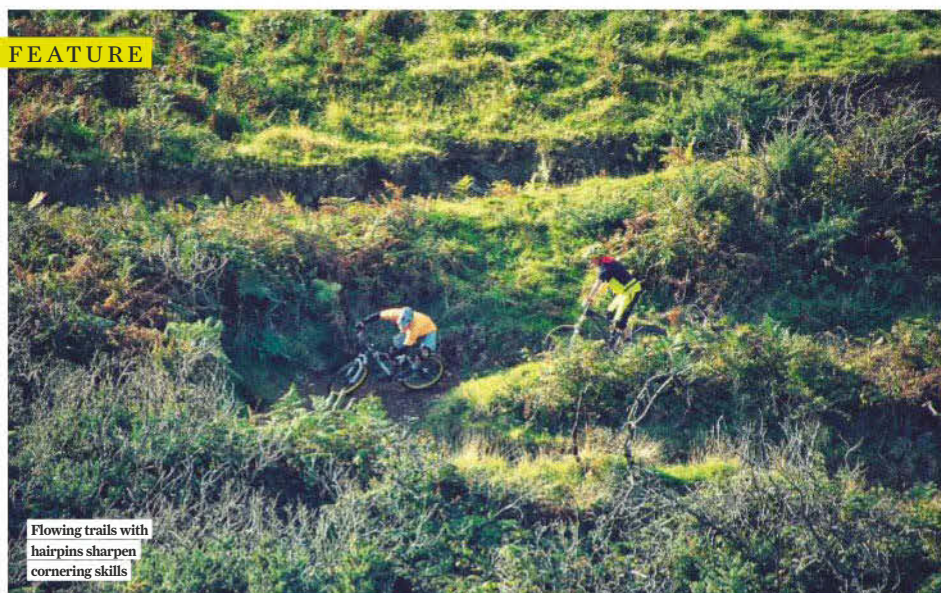
Off-piste perks are available for the more adventurous



Garry Harding (r) and local high-flyer Tony Williams chew the fat



Obstacles are mostly optional at Keypitts



Flowing trails with hairpins sharpen cornering skills

We are massively grateful to those who helped. A faithful few began the task of building trails, although none of us had any experience. Building things and then destroying them is horrible — but when you don't really know what you're doing you sometimes forget things like drainage. We'd be out no matter what the weather was doing, and after the first month or two, utter madness set in and it was a great laugh — although a little surreal after a while, as there was no end in sight. Trail madness is an odd thing and the highs of planning, building and riding sections with friends kept us going."

On layout-plotting, he explained: "We walked the site with a clipboard to look like we knew what we were doing, and sometimes using just a broom for handlebars we'd be thinking what would work and what wouldn't. Some things just aren't going to work, and we had to think what a novice could cope with, and also ask ourselves if we could the hit it at full-whack and get away with it."

SHIFTING EARTH

You can't help but be impressed with the sheer amount of soil that was moved, largely by hand, at Keypitts over the following few months. "We had the use of a mini-digger for a short while, and the trail on the valley side you were gawking at earlier was cut in by the farm owner and trials bike enthusiast Fred," explained Harding. "Thankfully Ed Firmin, from the farm, with Lee Biggs and Joel Edwards of South Fork, were there through the whole process to make up the core team. The farm supplied us with mattocks, shovels, saws and rakes. All of which are either now broken or missing in action."

We headed down into 'Angry Badger' with a promise of north shore and a rollable road gap. We'd brought Tony Williams from Evolve MTB to be our crash-test-dummy for the day. As a respected local mountain bike instructor who spends much of his time either riding on Dartmoor or standing on the podium at local downhill races, he was the perfect choice to be guinea pig. We couldn't help but allow the hand-built finish to encourage us to feel like we were riding the trails of our teenage years, as we split off the fast-paced VSB and into the Quarry line. Inspired to push the boat out from the start, we quickly found ourselves sessioning drop-offs and North Shore features with ever-widening smiles.

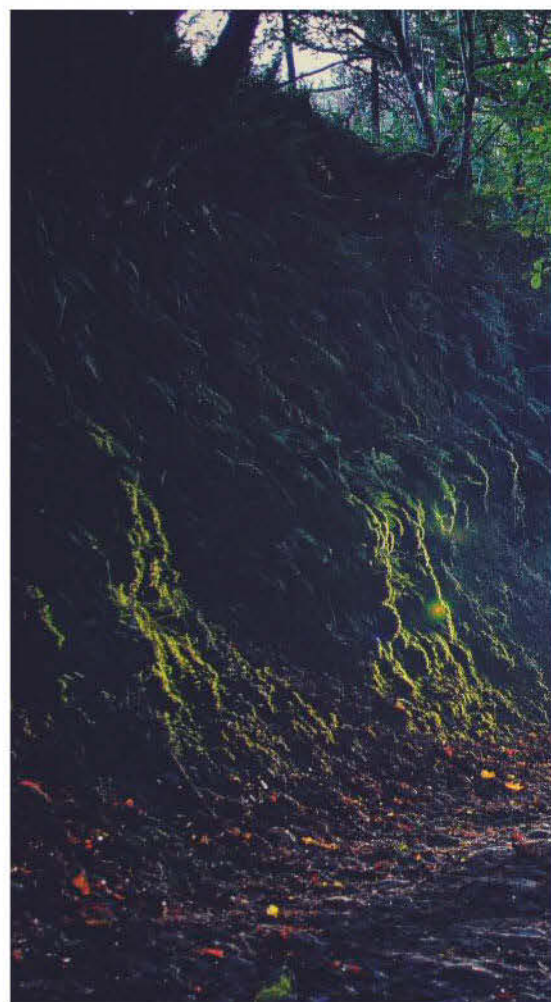
The build was clearly a huge undertaking,

WE CARRIED CLIPBOARDS TO LOOK LIKE WE KNEW WHAT WE WERE DOING, AND A BROOM FOR BARS

and not without its low points for the small crew. Harding explained how the poorly attended 2013 opening day at Keypitts had been labelled simply 'St Jude'. The centre opened during a storm in the last week of October — the preamble to one of the wettest winters in recorded history. But this opening day defiance defines the driving energy behind the guys building at Keypitts. The destruction and flooding across the south-west of England over the following months was devastating, but when asked about the damage caused to the build, Harding simply quipped, "We've learned a lot about drainage", before detailing the soul-destroying realisation that whole berms had been washed away. "With some hard graft, we now have better surfacing. Sometimes you've just got to struggle on and keep moving, even if it is very slowly."

The beauty is, that constant development means whenever they have a new idea, they have the flexibility (volunteers allowing) to put it into place. The enthusiasm of the guys here was nothing short of contagious, and once again we'd found ourselves larking about on our tour of the site at one the absolute beauties the team had built — a large bermed corner exiting under a road gap option.

Let's not get carried away; Keypitts is not another Bike Park Wales conveniently located on the English side of the Bristol Channel. It's not on that scale, and we wouldn't want it to be. With Exmoor within spitting distance, and having a truly unique setting, Keypitts is something very different. The whole place has a natural look and feel — something most trail centres are missing — and it delivers some downright fun trails that can challenge all levels. Our descent into the unassumingly named 'Quarry Line' was on the edge, and the red graded 'Coombe Raider' darts



Moderately technical singletrack keeps things interesting

through ancient woodland with a mixture of natural downhill-style switchbacks and flowing traverses of the valley wall.

Building is ongoing, and with more support from the local riding community, the potential is huge; Keypitts has the plans and the land available for further development, maybe including a dual slalom course.

There are seven individually named trails at Keypitts, ranging from Blue grade to a very-slippery-when-wet Black. "Visitor numbers are growing slowly as people get to know about Keypitts, but it's pure word of mouth — we don't have an advertising budget," jokes Harding. "We'd like to see it join a race series to really make it a fixture in the local scene," he adds.

Judging by Harding's achievements so far, we wouldn't be surprised to see Keypitts hosting a major race in a few years' time. Even now, though, this is a remarkable achievement, and the perfect bolt-on to any Exmoor experience. **mb**

Factfile

- Open Wednesday to Sunday 10am-4pm
- Cafe and changing facilities on site.
- Ride fee £5
- Facebook group: North Devon Mountain Bike Trails (keypitts)
- devonmtb.com

The good mix of trails will satisfy riders of all ability levels

3 more commercial trail centres



BIKE PARK WALES

The big daddy of all private trail centres, Bike Park Wales, near Merthyr Tydfil, boasts a posh glass-fronted visitor centre, efficient uplift service and guaranteed smiles, all from just £5 per day. Check out our ultimate guide to Bike Park Wales here: po.st/bpw

CHICKSANDS BIKE PARK

Situated in the heart of the Bedfordshire countryside, and around an hour's drive from London, Chicksands's sandy, all-weather soil makes it a magnet for winter weekend warriors. Crammed full of jumps and berms, it's the perfect place to brush up on your skills. Cost £5 per day. chicksandsbikepark.co.uk



PENSHURST OFF-ROAD CYCLING

Tucked away deep in the Garden of England, Penshurst Off-Road Cycling has a rich racing heritage. Along with a big dirt jump area, there are multiple downhill runs, and the centre plays host to frequent, and friendly, series of races during the summer. Cost £5 per day. facebook.com/PORCPenshurstOffRoadCycling

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Tested

SUPERSTAR AM CARBON WHEELSET

£599.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,723g (900g rear, 823g front) • Wheel sizes: 26in, 27.5in • Contact: superstarcomponents.com

At six hundred pounds these Superstar AM (all-mountain) carbon wheels are half the cost of Roval Traverse SLs (£1,200) and one-third the price of Easton Havens (£1,950). They're comparable to aluminium wheels in terms of cost but the big question is do they offer some tangible benefits on the scales and trails?

Superstar is able to get the price down by selling direct to the consumer; the rims are made in China (in Superstar's own mould) before being sent to the UK for assembly. It also uses its own Tesla EVO hubs to form the base of this wheelset. They use push-fit end caps and come in various axle standards — there's even an XD driver option for 11-speed SRAM. The sealed cartridge bearings are silky smooth and the freehub engagement is very quick, which helps make the wheel respond rapidly. It does, however, make an off-putting racket when freewheeling.

Good-quality bladed Sapim CX-Ray spokes (32 front and rear) tie the wheels together but that didn't stop me snapping one in the Lake District. In an unrelated issue the driver body fell off while putting the bike in the car, so perhaps Superstar needs to use tighter O-rings or think about a more permanent design to keep it in place.

Selling direct to market means you can't just take these wheels back into the shop if you have any problems, although Superstar does offer a lifetime truing service and crash replacement warranty for those nervy about carbon.

With an external width of 30mm and 24mm internal, the AM rim produces a big tyre footprint. They're very tall though, which makes getting a

tyre on or off impossible without a lever — it's also counter-intuitive as it reduces that tyre spread, and the extra material only serves to add more weight. Superstar says the rims are tubeless-ready but I didn't find them particularly so — you still have to buy and fit the rim tape and valves (£20 extra) yourself.

With very little lateral movement this is a brutally stiff set of wheels. Fitted to an Orange Five, the bike felt stiffer and faster but also harsher, with little in the way of give or compliance in the wheel to soften out little bumps in the trail. This is probably the wheelset's greatest shortcoming — there is so much radial stiffness that it seems most of the load gets transferred through to the bike and the suspension. I'll never know why I snapped a spoke on a straight, rocky section of trail, but I suspect the lack of give in

7

the rim inevitably means more force goes into the spokes and frame.

At 1,700g these wheels are weighty considering they're built from dark matter. I can't help thinking that a wheel built from carbon should be lighter than an alloy wheel, with improved ride feel. These wheels are stiff, tough and superbly priced, but they're a bit too weighty to be a viable alternative to Superstar's excellent alloy hoops.

Jamie Darlow

YOUR TESTERS



PAUL BURWELL

Ribs back to normal after last month's night riding incident with a tree. Added a new Segment to his quiver of Oranges.



MICK KIRKMAN

Just drew the short straw and got the winter tyres grouptest, handy since it's grim, wet, slippery and treacherous up north.



BEN SMITH

Wannabe downhill and in-house **mbr** designer. Mincing around on a new Canyon Spectral.



JIM CLARKSON

No relation to the other J Clarkson. Currently riding a battered, crumbly hardtail with a kid's seat on the back.



ANDY MCCANDLISH

On the comeback trail after breaking a wrist, tossing the caber apparently. Racking up the miles on a Pivot 29er.

DMR V12 FLAT PEDAL

£49.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 420g pair • Colours: black, white, silver, orange, yellow • Contact: upgradebikes.co.uk

It's hard to believe the DMR V12 flat pedal has been around for 18 years. For 2014, this design classic has been given a reboot, shedding weight and receiving a bigger, slimmer platform that is more stable and offers improved ground clearance.

The reduced weight is noticeable when cranking, allowing the pedal to turn over easier. The concave, 95mm wide body still cradles your foot, ensuring shoes feel well planted, without being so grippy that you can't shuffle position or quickly take a foot off to dab. The platform sits a little way out from the crank arm, which provides room for bigger feet, but I found it does reduce the cornering clearance a fraction. The V12 platform also flips slightly easier, especially when putting feet back on in a hurry, and this resulted in an imperfect foot position at times.

The V12s have good bearings, strong axles and solid performance at a fair price, but if you can spend more then I think there are slightly superior pedals available for trail riding, including DMR's own Vault.

Mick Kirkman



8

SALSA SALT FLAT CARBON BAR

£109.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 168g • Width: 750mm (tested) and 700mm • Rise: 0mm • Contact: ison-distribution.com

Like the Niner Flat Top tested last month, this Salsa Salt Flat Carbon bar may be useful if you have a 29er and the front-end needs lowering. It comes in two widths — 700mm or 750mm — both with an 11° bend and absolutely zero rise. Long control centres (the flat sections for the brake levers and shifters) mean there's plenty of room for all sorts of hardware, and to help prevent the bar slipping, Salsa adds a textured surface to the clamp area. The overall finish is top-notch, and even after a few months of riding it still looks as good as new.

Once fitted to my singlespeed hardtail, the bar's extra width resulted in better handling at pace, while there was also some noticeable flex which reduced trail buzz, even without gloves. My only slight reservation was that

getting through tight trees was a little worrying with this width of bar. So far my pinkies are still intact, and I haven't gone back to a narrower bar.

There aren't too many wide carbon flat bars around, but that's far from the only reason I'd recommend the Salt Flat. Go for the 750mm version, as it's the same price as the 700mm and the added control and resilience is a bonus — plus you can always chop it down using the handy cut guides.

Jim Clarkson



8



AQUAPAC SMALL BIKE MOUNTED PHONE CASE

£50

SPECIFICATION Weight: 53 and 36g • Mini version also available • Contact: Aquapac.net

To be honest I haven't been using this phone case as intended. It's a waterproof bag for your phone that mounts to the handlebar using a QR clamp, but since I always know where I'm going I never need bar-mounted navigation. I do like to keep my phone dry though, and this is where the Aquapac really helps. Water really can't get inside. Apparently the bag will even float if dropped in water. Obviously a cheap zip-lock bag will do the same job, but the Aquapac has a touch-sensitive front, so you can text or call without having to remove it. Admittedly, £50 is a lot of money; if you just want the waterproofness, you can save yourself £30 and buy the non-mountable version.

Paul Burwell

7

SCORES ON THE DOORS

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Our grading
system explained



1-4 Something's wrong. It's rare, but sometimes a product will have a design flaw or some other weakness that means we can't recommend it. Steer clear.

5-6 OK — one or two faults but it has potential.

7 Good — worth considering.

8 Very good — for the money, we'd buy it.

9 Excellent — a slight mod or two and it might be perfect.

10 Simply the best — we couldn't fault it.

TROY LEE D3 COMPOSITE HELMET

£349.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,123g (size M) • Sizes: S, M, L, XL • Helmet bag included • Contact: fisheroutdoor.co.uk

We tested the all-singing, all-dancing carbon Troy Lee D3 back in 2010 but this composite version is £80 cheaper and pretty much the same weight.

It still feels like a top-quality product — the peak and strap fittings are titanium (as they are on the carbon version) and the padding is deep and luxurious. It's very comfortable and fitted my head like a, er, glove. The helmet features dual-density padding that helps absorb shock in the event of a crash and the cheekpads are removable and washable, with tags that allow them to be removed with the helmet still worn in the event of a nasty crash.

The motocross-inspired looks moved the game on when it was introduced four years ago and it still looks fresh and super cool today. The red pinstripe shown here is no longer available, but as with all Troy Lee helmets there are a myriad of different colours and graphic styles to choose from.

On the bike the helmet felt great. The large frontal aperture meant plenty of space for goggles — I tried the Spy goggles (tested here) and my trusty Oakley O-Frames, and both fitted interference free, although the snug fit and deep padding meant it was very difficult to wear the helmet with riding glasses.

The helmet is well ventilated for a full-face, with large mesh-covered vents in the chin-bar that supply a decent amount of air when breathing hard. The ultimate test of a helmet is that it protects your head in a slam, and although I haven't crashed hard in it yet, the fact that I feel confident in its ability to protect me says a lot about the fit and quality.

The composite D3 may cost a lot of money, but it is a top-end, highly desirable product that looks the business. Only you know if you can justify the cost.

Ben Smith

GIRO CIPHER HELMET

£149.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,157g (size M) • Sizes: XS, S, M, L • Helmet bag and camera mount included • Contact: zyro.co.uk

The Cipher is a new design for this year and replaces the much-loved Remedy in Giro's range. It has a more current, moto-inspired look and feels much heavier-duty than the helmet it replaces, but thankfully the price has remained incredibly competitive. Construction is similar to the costlier D3 with an EPS core wrapped in the composite shell. It may lack the fancy titanium fittings but it still has similar removable linings, interchangeable cheekpads (also removable externally in the event of a big one), double d-ring fastening and adjustable peak.

The new styling comes with bold new graphics in the case of this matt black/white/red version and I think it looks great, although the matt finish does get a bit grubby.

The internal padding is not quite as plush as the Troy Lee but the fit is nice and snug. It feels slightly roomier on my head than the D3, in part due to the 'TuneUps' pockets near the ears in which you can place your earphones if you want to be accompanied by a soundtrack on the way down the hill.

The broad aperture gave good peripheral vision and accepted several goggles without issue. Riding glasses also worked better with this helmet than with the D3, the arms slotting better into the gaps between the padding.

The Cipher doesn't have as many vents as the D3 and isn't quite as cool in use. The chin vents in particular don't quite have the same free-breathing feel, but the performance is still excellent. Given the styling, high-quality build, comfort and price, it's hard to give the Cipher anything but top marks.

Ben Smith



Integrated camera mount felt quite flimsy in use



SPY WHIP MX GOGGLES

£39.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 112g • One size • Replacement lenses available • Soft bag included • Contact: spyoptic.com

Whether rocking the enduro look or running them with a full-face, these goggles come in so many different colour schemes that there should be a match for any outfit. The nose guard betrays the Whip's motocross origins and is overkill on an mtb, but they look really trick, especially with these smoke lenses with red Spectra coating. Clarity of the scratch-resistant lens is excellent and the smoke finish is fine in all but the darkest woods — other lenses are available if it's too dark for you. At £40 they are a little pricey but they're comfortable, resist steaming and are very well made.

Ben Smith



cannondale



2012 CANNONDALE SCALPEL 3
Carbon zero pivot frame, Lefty PBR fork, 20 speed Shimano SLiXXT gearing, Avid Elixir hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £3000 NOW £1999.99

rrp £3000
pauls £1599.99

SCOTT



2012 SCOTT GENIUS LT30
Alloy frame with 100mm travel, Rockbox front fork, 30 speed Shimano XTC gearing, Avid Elixir hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £2400 NOW £1249.99

rrp £2400
pauls £1249.99

GT



2012 GT KARAKORAM 29er
Alloy frame, Rockbox front fork, 27 speed Shimano Alivio gearing with Vector Aquila hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £800 NOW £399.99

rrp £800
pauls £399.99

cannondale



2013 CANNONDALE TRAIL SL1
Rockbox recon air fork, 30 speed Shimano Deore XT gearing, Shimano disc brakes. RRP £1100 NOW £749.99

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GIANT



2013 GIANT ANTHEM X29ER 3
Fox CDT fork and rear shock, 30 speed Shimano Deore SLiX gearing. RRP £1700 NOW £1274.99

rrp £1700
pauls £1274.99

CUBE



2013 CUBE LTD
Alloy frame, Rockbox Recon fork, 30 speed Shimano Deore XT gearing, Shimano hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £860 NOW £659.99

rrp £860
pauls £659.99

CUBE



2012 CUBE REACTION GTC SL
Carbon frame, Rockbox SLiD fork, 30 speed Shimano XT gearing, Formula disc brakes. RRP £1600 NOW £1249.99

rrp £1600
pauls £1249.99

GIANT



2012 GIANT XTC COMPOSITE 3
Carbon frame, Rockbox Recon Gold fork, 30 speed Shimano SLiX gearing, Avid hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £1300 NOW £829.99

rrp £1300
pauls £829.99

cannondale



2011 CANNONDALE TRAIL SL5
Alloy frame, BST Lockout fork, 24 speed Shimano Alivio gearing, cable disc brakes. RRP £500 NOW £379.99

rrp £500
pauls £379.99

cannondale



2011 CANNONDALE FLASH CARBON 3
Carbon BB30 frame, Lefty Speed air fork, 20 speed Shimano XT gearing, Avid Shimano hydraulic disc brakes with Shimano SLiX wheels. RRP £1700 NOW £1599.99

rrp £1700
pauls £1599.99

GIANT



2013 GIANT TRANCE X29ER 2
Alloy suspension 29er frame, Rockbox Recon fork, Monarch rear shock, SRAM 20 speed gearing, Shimano disc brakes. RRP £1500 NOW £1124.99

rrp £1500
pauls £1124.99

cannondale



2012 CANNONDALE FLASH 29ER ALLOY 3
Alloy frame, Rockbox Recon fork, 30 speed Shimano Deore SLiX gearing, Avid Elixir hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £1400 NOW £869.99

rrp £1400
pauls £869.99

cannondale



2012 CANNONDALE RZ120 3
Alloy frame, 120mm travel, X-Tension bottom bracket, Rockbox Recon fork, 30 speed Shimano SLiX gearing, Avid disc brakes. RRP £1500 NOW £999.99

rrp £1500
pauls £999.99

CUBE



2012 CUBE REACTION GTC SL
Carbon frame, Fox Float RL fork, 30 speed Shimano XT gearing and hydraulic disc brakes, DT CSW1 wheels. RRP £2000 NOW £1399.99

rrp £2000
pauls £1399.99

mongoose



2012 MONGOOSE SALVO COMP
Alloy frame, Rockbox Recon Silver poploc fork, 30 speed Shimano gearing and hydraulic disc brakes. RRP £1000 NOW £549.99

rrp £1000
pauls £549.99

GT



2012

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CUBE



2012

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mongoose



2012

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SALVO COMP	RRP £1000	NOW £549.99

SCOTT



2010

ASPECT 35	RRP £650	NOW £449.99
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2011

SCALE 40	RRP £1600	NOW £999.99
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2012

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SCALE 30	RRP £2400	NOW £1249.99
SCALE PREMIUM	RRP £3300	NOW £2499.99

2013

SCALE 700	RRP £1800	NOW £1439.99
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FLASH CARBON 1	RRP £4300	NOW £2579.99
RZ120 3	RRP £3000	NOW £1999.99
RZ120 2	RRP £1800	NOW £1199.99
SCALPEL 3	RRP £3000	NOW £1599.99

2013

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TRAIL SL 1	RRP £1100	NOW £749.99
TRAIL SL 4 WOMENS	RRP £630	NOW £499.99
F29 1	RRP £2000	NOW £1399.99
RZ120 2	RRP £1800	NOW £1299.99
RZ120 1	RRP £1500	NOW £999.99
SCALPEL 29ER 1 CARBON	RRP £6000	NOW £1099.99
SCALPEL 29ER 2	RRP £3200	NOW £2599.99
JEKYL 3	RRP £2200	NOW £2199.99
TRIGGER 29ER 1	RRP £3600	NOW £1539.99
TRIGGER 29ER 2	RRP £3000	NOW £2499.99
TRIGGER 29ER 3	RRP £2600	NOW £1499.99

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MAGURA MT5 DISC BRAKE

£124.95

SPECIFICATION Weight: front brake 386g 180mm rotor • Rotors: 203, 180, 160, 140mm • Contact: zyro.co.uk

Magura has two four-piston brakes in its range, a top model called the MT7 and the mid-priced MT5. Both use the same four-pot caliper but the MT5 has a heavier aluminium lever and does away with the tool-free reach adjustment. When I rode both brakes at the press launch back in the spring, I preferred the feel of the MT5, which is why I'm testing it here. It's also £95 cheaper.

The housing and handlebar clamp on the MT5 are made from Carbotechnology, a carbon-fibre material that Magura is able to

injection-mould. The result is lighter weight but it also means the inside of the master cylinder is very precisely made, which reduces friction on the main piston and results in an incredibly light lever action. Less effort is needed to operate the brake, reducing fatigue and giving more precise control.

The two-finger, aluminium brake lever has adjustable reach via a small 3mm Allen key on the front. This has a wide range of adjustment, even allowing you to position the lever really close in, which is often a problem with radial designs.

For easy brake pad replacement/installation, the MT5 caliper comes with magnetic pistons. Two types of brake pad are available: a one-piece design or two individual

pads. If you use the latter, there are four pads per caliper. The one-piece pad is easier to fit and provides better heat-dissipation, but neither design runs drag-free out of the box. They do bed-in, though; you just have to re-set the pistons and pads a few times on the first few rides.

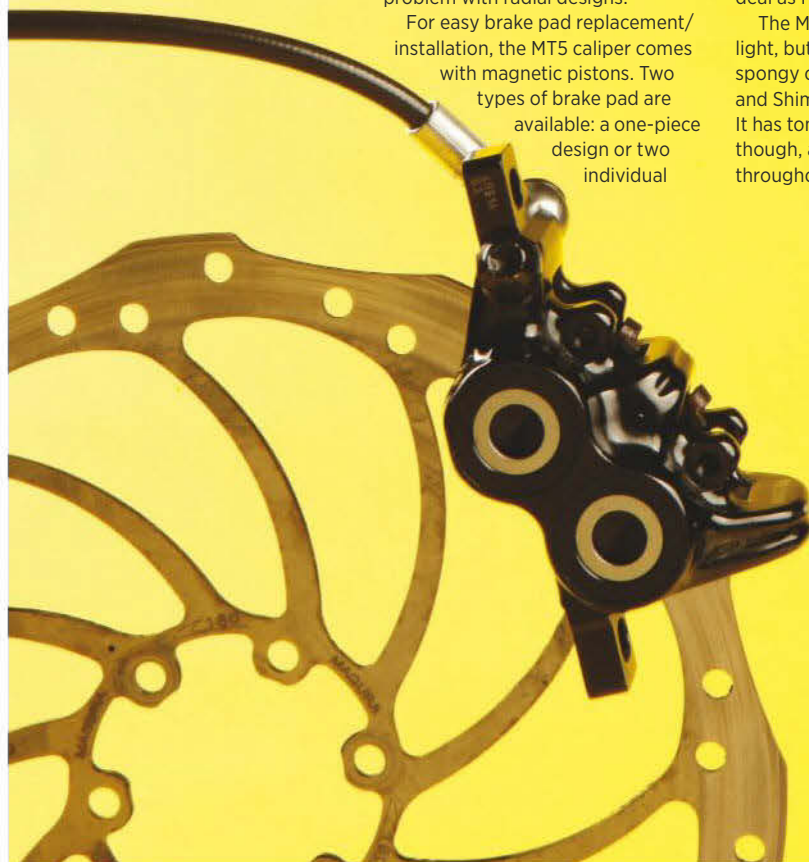
Magura doesn't offer pre-cut hose lengths, something I've criticised before, but after cutting the hose down, fitting a new barb and olive and then plugging it back into the lever, I found I didn't have to bleed it, so maybe it's not as big a deal as I first thought.

The MT5 lever action may be light, but it's also a little spongy compared to Avid and Shimano brakes. It has tons of power, though, and it's really even throughout the lever travel.

It has also been pretty consistent; the bite-point never changes, and the lever doesn't pull to the bar one minute and firm up the next. My only issue with the lever is that it's not a particularly comfortable shape, but some of this is due to the way it arcs into the bar when pulling really hard. My other big criticism is of the bolt hardware. Magura uses very shallow Torx bolts to mount the caliper to the frame and they have a ton of Threadlock on them. This means they take an age to get tight and minor adjustments are more of a hassle than they need to be.

To get the MT5 working right, you do need to invest a bit of time, but you get a powerful four-piston brake that is reliable, lightweight and surprisingly good value.

Paul Burwell



Lever operation is good but its shape could be comfier



There's a choice of pads: two separate or one-piece

700 MEMBRANE WATERPROOF JACKET

8283483

Customer Rating:



Waterproof membrane

Watertight zip

Breathable for greater thermal comfort

Light Weight

Wear-resistant membrane

£59⁹⁹





MICHELIN WILD ROCK'R 2 ADVANCED REINFORCED

£45.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 1,100g (27.5in) • Sizes: 26, 27.5, 29x2.35in • Magi-X soft dual-compound or Gum-X hard compound • Contact: bike.michelin.co.uk

When choosing tyres, it's hard to ignore the might of Maxxis — it provides just about any tyre in any compound for any use. It'll take something special to sway riders away, and with this tubeless-ready Wild Rock'R 2 Advanced Reinforced (if the excessively long name isn't off-putting), Michelin may just do that.

Designed for enduro use, this tyre is aimed at dry, rough conditions, using a tread of angular centre-knobs and large, chunky side-blocks. At 1,100g each, it's a serious tyre, so where better to test it than in the Alps? I spent a week riding a pair of the 27.5in dual-ply Rock'R over everything from dry, loose gravel to thick, wet mud, rocks, roots, and a fair amount of uphill. In all these conditions, the tyre always felt predictable, and I'd never have guessed this was the harder of the two compounds available. This is particularly impressive because I tend to run higher tyre pressures than most, but instead of giving a harsh and bouncy sensation, they

rode as if they were 10psi lower and with grip to match.

Michelin says these are for dry use but a lot of the stuff I rode was either damp or full-on wet, and I never found myself getting caught out. Predictability was key — they would slide on roots but you'd feel it begin to happen, giving time to react. It's worth noting that these tyres aren't front- or rear-specific, but Michelin does recommend using the softer Magi-X compound only on the front.

On flatter sections, rolling resistance wasn't a big problem, though in terms of wear, a week in the Alps certainly left its mark; on the rear tyre, small chunks had been nibbled away from the knobs. Nevertheless, the blocks haven't worn down much, the sidewalls look fine and I had just one puncture (running tubes) all week. They're pretty heavy for most trail riding, but look no further if you're after a burly enduro race tyre.

Roo Fowler

OSPREY REV SOLO

£25

SPECIFICATION Weight: 210g • Capacity: 600ml bottle • Colours: blue/grey/green • Contact: ospreyeurope.com

Osprey can call the Rev Solo what it wants — we all know it's a bum bag. It's designed principally for running but we put it to good use on the trail, during short rides or when our bike didn't have provision for a bottle.

Clip the pack on and it feels very comfortable, and even a little supportive, as the lumbar cushioning wraps the small of your back. The straps have some give in them to stop the Rev Solo cutting into your midriff and also dampen down any bounce from the weight of water as you move. It stayed solidly in position even on rough trails and jumps, to the point where it really felt like riding packless. Inside, there's a shaped bottle that curves round your back

for comfort, and the vessel is held in place with a simple fabric loop — there's a toggle too for extra security and you can access the bottle from either side. And you can forget fumbling behind your back for the bottle mid-ride, because unlike a trail pack, the Rev Solo just slides round to your front. The mesh pockets on the side accommodate a multi-tool and an energy bar, while there's a water-resistant pocket on the front for a smartphone — you can even use the touchscreen through the plastic window.

The Rev Solo works because the ergo bottle is held horizontally and not vertically or diagonally (as other manufacturers



favour). It's not trying to provide anything more than the simple basics of water and phone, but it does that very well and it's cheap too.

Jamie Darlow



£49.99

500 XC LTD EDITION

8315829



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Wrist cuffs, high neck
Features 3 large pockets
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Countless hours on the trails make this the ultimate test of performance as well as reliability



INTRODUCING

JAMIE'S LAPIERRE ZESTY TR 329

£1,749.99 / 29in / hotlines-uk.com



THE RIDER

JAMIE DARLOW

Position Staff writer

Mostly rides

Surrey Hills

Height 6ft 1in

Weight 75kg

THE BIKE

■ 120mm-travel 29er with an XC slant

■ Fox Float CTD shock mated to RockShox Recon fork

■ Budget, but decent-performing components

■ No dropper post or quick-release seat collar

There's something about jumping on a Lapierre that's instantly pleasing, and a big grin never fails to arrive upon one's mush as one points it down the first trail. I'm a big fan of the OST+ suspension platform, and you can feel its heartbeat pulsing through any Zesty or Spicy, the entry-level 329 included. I can already tell we're going to be friends.

Lapierre splits the Zesty into two disciplines: AM with 150mm of travel and 650b wheels, and the more trail-focused TR here, with 120mm of suspension and 29in wheels. Being tall and gangly, I'm pleased to be back on big wheels after riding a series of 650b bikes in recent months. There's something reassuring about the feel of a well-designed 29er — the greater stability and their knack of maintaining more momentum than 650b, and the knowledge it'll roll over stuff happily... and hopefully with you still on board.

The basic 329 here is one of four bikes in the TR range, with the top two models equipped with clever E:i shock technology, a system that automatically locks out the

rear shock when you're climbing to make the bike more efficient. I'm disappointed not to be getting my hands on this gizmo, as I know from a test ride it works pretty well — and, since the TR 329 weighs 31.5lb, I'm going to need help on the climbs.

In a big penny-pinching nod, Lapierre has specced the RockShox Recon, a mid-range fork designed for XC. The Recon's max travel is usually 100mm in 29er format, but this Lapierre-specific version has been stretched to fit the 120mm Zesty. A fork working at its absolute capacity doesn't fill me with confidence for its performance, but I'll have to trust the engineers at Lapierre that it really is up to the job in terms of damping and stiffness.

I can forgive Lapierre for not fitting a dropper post on the 329 — even though all the others in the Zesty, and bigger-travel, Spicy ranges have them. What I can't forgive Lapierre for is not fitting a QR seat collar so you have to keep your multi-tool to hand at all times to drop or raise the saddle. Either they intend me to keep my saddle at the same height for ever, or they want



New Nobby Nics get a second chance

me to buy a dropper post straight away. I think I'll try a QR collar.

I thought I was going to have to invest in some new tyres straight away too, because Nobby Nics have always hated me. That ping as the edge knob gives way is a sound I don't like much. But these are the new mark II versions, with softer, grippier lugs, so I'm willing to give them a second chance. Should the heavens open, however, I'm reserving the right to sling on some mud tyres.

I said the 329 and I are already great buddies, but like all good friends, there'll be some arguments and harsh words along the way I'm sure.

WHY IT'S HERE
To find out if the Zesty works best in 29er format



A flourishing relationship has already been forged...



...although the lack of a QR collar means we aren't yet sitting pretty



The Recon fork shaves a few shillings from the price tag

IN THE SHED



Canyon Spectral AL 6.9 £1,699

29in



Giant Trance Advanced 27.5 2 £2,699

650b



Kona Process 134 £2,399

650b



Lapierre Zesty TR 329 £1,749.99

29in



Orbea Rallon X30 £2,289

650b



Specialized Camber Evo 29 £2,000

29in

SPECIFICATION

Frame Alloy Supreme 6 OST+ 120mm travel

Shock Fox Float CTD Evolution

Fork RockShox Recon Gold Solo Air, 120mm travel

Wheels Formula hubs, Mavic EN321 rims, Schwalbe Nobby Nic Performance 2.25in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM S1000 36/22t chainset, SRAM X7 f-mech, Shimano XT r-mech, Shimano Deore shifters

Brakes Shimano Deore

Components Easton stem and seatpost, FUNN Nico Vouilloz 720mm bar, Lapierre saddle

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight 14.3kg (31.5lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested XL

Head angle 68.1°

Seat angle 70.9°

BB height 336mm

Chainstay 442mm

Front centre 753mm

Wheelbase 1,195mm

Down tube 725mm

Top tube 645mm

Reach 467mm



INTRODUCING

DANNY'S SPECIALIZED CAMBER EVO 29

£2,000 / 29in / specialized.com



THE RIDER

DANNY MILNER

Position Deputy editor
Mostly rides Surrey Hills
Height 5ft 11in
Weight 72kg

THE BIKE

■ 120mm-travel 29er with aggressive spec and geometry
 ■ Evo model is slacker, lower, longer-travel and gets wider bars and fatter tyres
 ■ £200 cheaper for 2015

We're already big fans of the Specialized Camber Evo 29 here at **mbr**. It collected a test win and a perfect 10 score back in the March issue, and this achievement also secured it a place among the shortlist for our 2014 Bike of the Year. Only its bigger brother — the Stumpjumper Evo 29 — prevented it staggering home from our awards with a full complement of silverware. Beaten only by its in-house competition, such strength in numbers just goes to show what a formidable line-up of suspension bikes Specialized continues to field.

However, this infighting obviously hasn't escaped the attention of the top brass, because to lever a little daylight between the two for 2015, there's been some movement on prices. The new Camber Evo is 10 per cent cheaper, and now undercuts the Stumpjumper by a not inconsiderable £500. Better still, the changes could be described as upgrades: there are Shimano Deore brakes in place of Formula's C1 and

updated Roval Fattie rims, now boasting a 29mm internal width.

Such fiscal sorcery does pose the question: was last year's bike overpriced, or is this year's model just a stone-cold bargain? My guess is a little bit of both, allied to a more aggressive pricing strategy.

While the Camber Evo is no stranger to the pages of **mbr**, this is the first time I've actually swung a leg over one. Consequently, I'm keen to see if it really lives up to the hype. Big on wheels and short on travel, the Camber Evo is regularly judged to be much more than the sum of its numbers; it's a bike that can do a lot with very little, and one that places an emphasis on having fun above all else. It sounds like it should be right up my street, and judging by its palmarès, winning me over should be a mere formality. But...

And it's a big but — I've just spent nearly 12 months aboard a custom-built Kona Process 111 — a short-travel

29er that fulfils almost exactly the same brief as the Camber Evo — and during that time I've fallen for it head over heels. It's a bike that continues to astound me with its capabilities, and rewards me with unparalleled levels of fun. Equalling, or exceeding, my regard for the Kona is going to be a challenge, not least because the Camber costs half the price.

First impressions are promising, though. Take a close look at the M5 aluminium frame, and it's hard not to be extremely impressed by the quality of the welds and the sophistication of the tubing profiles. It's a thing of beauty, a world apart from Kona's rough and ready construction. I'm a big fan of the Kona's low-profile and generous standover, but the Camber puts it to

shame aesthetically. That Gloss Hyper yellow paint is stunning too, and the very opposite of Kona's smudgy dark red and black combo. The question is, will it shine as brightly on the trails as its paintjob suggests?

WHY IT'S HERE
Bike of the Year
contender that's
better value
than ever
before



Fitting Shimano brakes is usually a formula for success



The Dangler aims to reduce dropped chains

SPECIFICATION

Frame M5 alloy, 120mm travel

Shock Fox Float CTD Evolution

Fork RockShox Reba RC, 120mm travel

Wheels Specialized Hi Lo hubs, Roval Fattie rims, Specialized Butcher Control/ Ground Control 29 x 2.3in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM S1250 chainset, SRAM X9 r-mech and X7 shifters

Brakes Shimano Deore, 203/180mm

Components Specialized

Weight 13.18kg (29.07lb)

Sizes S, M, L, XL

GEOMETRY

Size ridden L

Head angle 68.6°

Seat angle 69.2°

BB height 330mm

Chainstay 455mm

Front centre 712mm

Wheelbase 1,167mm

Downtube 706mm

Top tube 619mm

Reach 434mm



Will the Camber's performance outshine its paintjob?



Evo link adds travel and attitude



INTRODUCING

JASON'S KONA PROCESS 134

£2,399 / 650b / konaworld.com

THE RIDER

JASON HARDY

Position Picture editor
Mostly rides Surrey Hills
Height 6ft 2in
Weight 101kg

THE BIKE

- Mid-travel bike in the Kona Process range
- Long front-end, chunky rear
- 134mm of travel with 140mm fork
- 40mm stems on all four sizes

The revolving door that is **mbr's** longtermer fleet sees me replacing my Specialized Stumpy Evo 29er with the 2015 Kona Process 134. I've been looking forward to getting my hands on this bike for quite some time, Kona being a brand I coveted during the early Nineties. This bike, however, couldn't be further removed from those rigid, skinny-tubed, steel machines of 20 years ago.

Out of the box the Process 134 looks sorted. Even in an XL size the burly frame is super low-slung, with the huge reinforcing gusset between the top tube and seat tube boosting standover clearance. The shock mount on the underside of the top tube is, to me, a thing of beauty; it looks almost art deco in its design viewed from the side.

It's not all about symmetry and clean flowing lines however, function also has its place. At the other end of the shock, Kona employs an extender yoke to eliminate one of the bushings, reducing breakaway friction and making the suspension more sensitive. It's a similar set-up to my old

Stumpy, the difference being that you're not locked into a bespoke shock with Kona's design.

The big functional welds on the frame aren't the neatest, but the overall impression is one of strength. Nowhere is this more apparent than the 134mm-travel rear-end. Massively oversized seatstays just ooze a feeling of invincibility, but I suspect heel clearance could be an issue for me again, especially with the relatively short chainstays bringing the 142x12mm dropouts even closer to my size-11 feet. The trade-off for all this brawny show of strength is weight — my XL size Process 134 weighs in at a hair over 33lb without pedals.

WTB rims and plain gauge spokes on Shimano Deore hubs continue with the bulletproof theme. I'll be keeping a close eye on the cup and cone hubs, however, as we've had problems with these in the past. The rims are also tubeless-ready and Kona handily provides a set of valve stems in the



Oh la la! An 'art deco' shock mount

WHY IT'S HERE
It's big and burly, just like the rider!

box, just make sure you get hold of them when you collect your bike. Seeing as we're just headed into winter I'll be swapping the Maxxis Ardent tyres for something more suited to the inevitable gloom, so it's the perfect opportunity to put the tubeless set-up to the test and start chipping away the Kona's weight.

First ride out and I've already spotted some possible weaknesses in the spec. Cast your eye from the hefty rear



Jason's feeding his Kona craving



Sektor fork seems spindly for such a beefy frame

suspension and along the solid aluminium frame, and the 32mm upper legs on the 140mm-travel RockShox Sektor fork suddenly look out of place on a build that shouts out for hard riding. Also, while the KS dropper post is welcome, the miserly 100mm of drop has already seen the saddle slamming my chest on steep chutes.

On the plus side it feels good to be back on Shimano's brakes and gears, I'd forgotten how much I'd missed the dual direction downshift button on the Deore shifters. The Deore double chainset runs 24/38t rings, and the XT rear mech with its clutch mechanism definitely helps keep changes smooth and quiet.

So the Process is a pretty solid package with some inevitable weaknesses for a bike built to such a competitive price point. Having ridden **mbr's** Bike of the Year (the Specialized Stumpjumper Comp Evo 29er) for the last year, the Process has a tough act to follow, but on first impressions alone I think this burly bruiser is more than up for a fight.



Expect these stays to polish up a treat thanks to Jason's size 11s

SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061 aluminum, 134mm travel

Shock RockShox Monarch R

Fork RockShox Sektor Silver TK Solo Air, 140mm travel

Wheels Shimano Deore hubs, WTB ST i23 TCS rims, Maxxis Ardent EXO TR 2.25in tyres

Drivetrain Shimano Deore 24/38t chainset, Shimano XT Shadow Plus r-mech, SRAM X5 f-mech, Shimano Deore shifters

Brakes Shimano Deore 180/160mm

Components Kona 760mm bar and 40mm stem, KS Eten R dropper, WTB Volt saddle

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight 14.98kg (33.02lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested XL

Head angle 67.9°

Seat angle 68.7°

Bottom bracket 342mm

Chainstay 425mm

Front centre 778mm

Wheelbase 1,203mm

Down tube 732mm

Top tube 660mm

Reach 485mm

Thanks to Sheryl and the Café La Crème H-Van for the backdrop. They can be found at Denbies Hillside Carpark, Ranmore Common near Dorking every Sunday during the winter. [facebook.com/classiccafela Creme](https://www.facebook.com/classiccafela Creme)

BEN'S CANYON SPECTRAL AL 6.9

£1,699 / 29in / canyon.com



THE RIDER

BEN SMITH

Position Art editor

Mostly rides Surrey Hills

Height 5ft 9in

Weight 76kg

THE BIKE

■ 130mm-travel 29er with a trail-ready set-up

■ Fox 32 Float CTD fork and matching rear shock

■ Reverb Stealth, short stem and wide bar as standard

■ Two colour options and four sizes

This month a group of us from the office took a trip up the M6 to have a go at the Lakeland Monster Miles Adventure-X sportive that's co-organised by **mbr** and sister magazine *Cycling Weekly*. Ideal for

cyclo-cross and hardtail riders, the terrain proved a little tame for our burly full-sussers. Still, the weather was gorgeous, the scenery stunning, and with the CTD levers on my Fox suspension flicked to Climb mode for the duration of the ride, the Canyon coped happily for a great day out on the bike.

The rest of the weekend was spent sampling some of the gnarlier trails that the Lake District has to offer. First up was a lap of the Altura trail at Whinlatter for a quick speed fix. The following day we saddled up for a big-mountain epic over Helvellyn and down Sticks Pass. With the mountains shrouded in low cloud and pouring rain, my back certainly felt the strain of the Canyon's full 30lb-plus during the hike-a-bike up Dollywagon Pike. Fortunately, the grippy Maxxis High Roller 2/Ardent tyres that I'd fitted in time for the trip, and the extra traction afforded by the 29er wheels, meant the mellower sections of the climb could be dispatched with sweaty, grunting efforts... success!

It wasn't all plain sailing, however. Being more used to the Surrey Hills' flowing singletrack, the steep, loose rock and boulder fields of the Lakes meant that the ride back down was as big a shock to the system as the climb up. I was impressed with how well the big wheels rolled over the rocks, once I had the balls to let go of the brakes, but the slightly dull-feeling suspension reduced my ability to skip the



Getting fast and loose descending Sticks Pass



Testing the versatility of the Canyon's 29in wheels

SPECIFICATION

Frame Aluminium, 130mm travel

Shock Fox Float CTD Performance BV

Fork Fox 32 Float CTD Evolution, 130mm travel

Wheels Mavic Cross-Ride 29, Continental Mountain King/X-King 2.4in tyres

Drivetrain Race Face Evolve 36/22t chainset, Shimano XT Shadow Plus r-mech, SLX f-mech and shifters

Brakes Avid Elixir 5

Components Crank Brothers Iridium bar, stem and saddle, RockShox Reverb Stealth dropper post

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight 13.7kg (30.2lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested L

Head angle 67.9°

Seat angle 67.4°

BB height 338mm

Chainstay 445mm

Front centre 718mm

Wheelbase 1,163mm

Down tube 706mm

Top tube 608mm

Reach 440mm

WHY IT'S HERE
It's my first go at living with a 29er

bike around on the trail and put my wheels exactly where I wanted them. The descent was still amazing, though, with huge grins all round at the bottom.

On the long drive home, I came to the conclusion that the Canyon's lack of agility probably has more to do with the suspension than the wheel size. The Fox CTD kit has always felt plush but it's also wallowy and lacks pop, so I'm going to play around with volume reducers and the rebound damping in the hope of putting some spring in its step. In the meantime, the Maxxis tyres have boosted my confidence massively, just in time for the intermittent action of the Avid Elixir rear brake to rob me of it again. I can't believe that I need to get the bleed kit out already. At least Canyon has made the switch to Shimano SLX brakes on the 2015 model.



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DAVE'S GIANT TRANCE ADVANCED 27.5 2

£2,699 / 650b / giant-bicycles.com



THE RIDER

DAVE ARTHUR

Position writer/tester
Mostly rides FOD/Wales
Height 5ft 11in
Weight 66kg

THE BIKE

- 140mm trail bike with carbon front-end
- Complete redesign with 650b wheels and new attitude
- 2x10 drivetrain with an MRP chainguide and Type 2 rear mech
- Internally routed Giant dropper post

Last month I promised that I would update you on my efforts to get a volume-reducing kit for the Giant's RockShox Monarch shock. My attempts initially went nowhere because RockShox doesn't offer a kit, but thanks to the very helpful people over at TF Tuned, I have finally succeeded.

Why did I want to reduce the spring volume in the first place? In a nutshell, I wanted to give the suspension more pop and make the bike feel more lively. By making the Maestro suspension on the Trance more progressive, I was also hoping for better mid-stroke support for climbing, as I've felt that, even though the Trance is a very competent 140mm bike in most situations, the shock hadn't really performed to its potential.

So, revitalised shock fitted and first ride out... what a difference. Following the volume reduction, I've dropped the shock pressure down from 190psi to 155psi and I still get 25 per cent sag as previously. The most noticeable difference this has made to the Trance is how much freer and more lively the shock feels; there's way more grip too. The improvements are most discernible in the beginning and mid-stroke, where it now feels far more responsive and better able to react to multiple impacts at speed.

That assessment is based on just a couple of rides since the shock arrived back from TF Tuned. Obviously I need to do more riding and experimenting with the air pressure and rebound settings, but even after these first outings on the modification, it feels extremely positive and well worth the effort. That such a seemingly simple change can make such a difference is revealing, and shows there's a lot more tuning potential in even basic air shocks than just air pressure and rebound adjustment. I only wish I had done it sooner!

It's been a busy month for the Trance, then, and it's



RockShox Monarch shock: now with reduced volume



Wheels have been upgraded to a set of American Classics

WHY IT'S HERE
Big wheels, more travel and slacker geometry make an all-new Trance

not all been about suspension. I've also upgraded the wheels to some American Classics with a view to decreasing rotational weight, especially now that the trails are getting muddy and running more slowly. The rims are tubeless-ready so I might be looking for some suitable winter tubeless tyres for my next update. And 780mm is the new 750mm when it comes to handlebars, right? Yup, you guessed it, I've fitted a wider bar, and it has really improved cornering control.

SPECIFICATION

Frame Advanced-Grade Composite/Aluxx SL Rear, 140mm travel

Shock RockShox Monarch RT

Fork RockShox Sektor RL Solo Air, 140mm travel

Wheels Giant P-XC hubs, P-XC2 rims, Schwalbe Nobby Nic 2.25in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM S1000 chainset, MRP 2x Guide, SRAM X9 r-mech, X7 shifters and f-mech

Brakes Avid Elixir 7

Components Giant Connect SL, Contact Switch-R dropper post
Sizes S, M, L

Weight 13.25kg (29lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested L

Head angle 67°

Seat angle 73.5°

BB height 320mm

Chainstay 440mm

Front centre 737mm

Wheelbase 1,177mm

Down tube 700mm

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2014

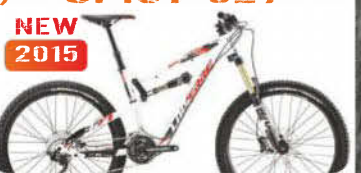


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THE
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VERDICT

ROO'S ORBEA RALLON X30

£2,289 (with upgrades) / 650b / orbea.com



THE RIDER

ROO FOWLER

Position Photographer
Mostly rides Surrey Hills
Height 6ft 4in
Weight 88kg

THE BIKE

- 650b enduro race bike that won't break the bank
- 160mm-travel Fox CTD suspension and adjustable frame geometry
- Direct sales from Spain with customisable spec
- 2x10 drivetrain with bashguard

What attracted you to the Orbea?

One glance at the Rallon and I saw a bike that looked right aesthetically, with equally good numbers on the geometry chart. Factor in the competitive pricing for a 160mm-travel enduro bike and I was itching to give the Rallon a go.

Did you change anything straightaway?

No. But I actually changed some of the parts before the bike even arrived. I was able to do this because Orbea's bikes are assembled and finished in Spain, which in turn gives you the option to swap or upgrade some of the components when ordering the bike. The choice wasn't huge on the Rallon X30, but from the drop-down menus on the website I opted to swap the stock Formula C1 brakes for market-leading Shimano SLX. There was a £95 up-charge for doing so, bringing the total cost of the bike to £2,294.

Was the bike easy to set up?

Not as easy as it should have been. The main issue was that the SLX brakes came

Euro style, with the front brake on the left, so my first task was to swap the brake hoses around. To do the job properly you really need a Shimano bleed kit and seeing as the bike isn't supplied with one this delayed me getting out on the trails. First ride out I decided to flip the geometry chip that slackens the head angle and lowers the BB height. It took a couple of minutes to do and I've ridden it in that setting ever since.

How did it ride?

In a word — brilliantly. What looked right on paper turned out to be right out on the trail too. The frame proportions felt great and the bike was fast and fun to ride. Of all the 160mm-travel bikes I've ridden, the Orbea has one of the best rear suspension systems. Even specced with the most basic Fox CTD shock it felt incredibly active in all conditions, bar pedalling. I suspect the BOS-equipped version feels even better.

WHY IT'S HERE
An enduro bike with great geometry and a killer price, but is there a catch?

The Shimano gears and brakes have performed perfectly over six months of riding, and it was really only the front end that was a bit of a letdown — the Fox 34 CTD Evolution fork felt mediocre until a FIT cartridge was fitted. After that it did a much better job of matching the rear in terms of sensitivity and support.

Did anything break or wear out?

I'm not known as **mbr's** snapper just because I take photos — any bike I swing a leg over usually gets returned with something broken or worn out, and the Orbea was no exception. Shortly after I blew up the Evolution series damper in the fork, the frame cracked just above the brake mount. Orbea had already issued a recall and I was promptly shipped a new seatstay assembly. Since replacing it with the modified version I've had no issues. My real bugbear however was the cheap Shimano QR rear hub. Not only were the



↑ HIGHS

- Riding for six days in the Alps feeling totally comfortable on the bike.
- Putting a 50mm stem and 800mm bars on to find the bike actually felt bigger as well as better.
- The way the FIT fork cartridge transformed the way the bike rode.

↓ LOWS

- Taking the rear wheel out and having the axle and bearings fall on the floor.
- Discovering the broken chainstay as I was about to head out for a ride.
- An obvious one, but saying goodbye to one of the best frames I've ridden.

cones forever coming loose, the rear axle snapped in half. Also, it's never going to be as stiff as a bolt-thru design, and given the lack of tyre clearance on the rear, a more stout set-up would definitely help prevent the rear tyre rubbing on the inside of the seatsays when cornering hard.

If you could change one thing about your longtermer what would it be?

I'd have a 142x12mm rear end and the better hub that goes with it.

Would you buy this bike and why?

Yes. Even with all of the issues I had with the Rallon X30 I'd be happy to drop just over £2k on one. It's a great bike considering the price but it's the frame and rear suspension that make it so special and form a sound basis for upgrading. Just double-check the pricing of the upgrade options on the Orbea website as it's cheaper to buy some parts like the RockShox Reverb independently.



SPECIFICATION

Frame Hydroformed triple-butt alloy, 160mm travel with adjustable geometry
Shock Fox Float CTD Boost Valve
Fork Fox 34 Float CTD Evolution, 160mm travel
Wheels Shimano Deore hubs, Mavic XM319 disc rims, Geax Goma 2.4/2.25in tyres
Drivetrain Race Face Ride 24x36t with bashguard, Shimano SLX shifters and r-mech, Deore F-mech.
Brakes Shimano SLX
Components Race Face Evolve 750mm riser bar, Race Face Ride 70mm stem and Ride seatpost
Sizes S, M, L
Weight 14.97kg (33lb)

GEOMETRY

(in lowest setting)
Size L
Head angle 65.2°
Seat angle 70°
BB height 338mm
Chainstay 420mm
Front centre 785mm
Wheelbase 1,205mm
Down tube 725mm



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Winter riding

Learn to ride, not slide, with our two-part guide to winter riding techniques

Words: Chris Ball Photos: Andy McCandlish

Winter is here, frost is on the ground or soon will be, leaves are dropping from the trees and puddles are starting to form on the trail. It's a time when riding becomes a lot more challenging and many of us think twice before dropping into steep and rooty trails, no matter how familiar. But what bearing does this seasonal change actually have on skill and technique?

In reality, very little. The basics are still the basics; your body position and the fundamental building blocks of your riding shouldn't change. In fact, they should never change, just adapt. This month we're going to look at how to make those adaptations and hopefully give you a few little pointers to reduce the frustrations and get the confidence up.

FIT A MUDGUARD

This is a simple fix, but one that will make the world of difference to your riding. Almost every month, we tell you where to look, what to look at and to make sure your head's up, looking down the trail and seeing things well in advance. That's all totally pointless if you can't see where you're going, though, so it's crucial to fit a mudguard.

Modern mudguards that mount to the fork brace are ideal, as they tend not to clog up so often, fit almost everything and move with your fork as it steers. Add some riding glasses with a clear lens and keep a cloth in a dry pocket to wipe them. You might find your glasses steam up when it's damp and mild, but with a mudguard, your vision should be just fine and that will make a massive difference to your confidence and commitment.



YOUR EXPERT

CHRIS BALL
Skills maestro Chris teaches mountain biking at Dirtschool, and he's also managing director of the Enduro World Series



LINE CHOICE

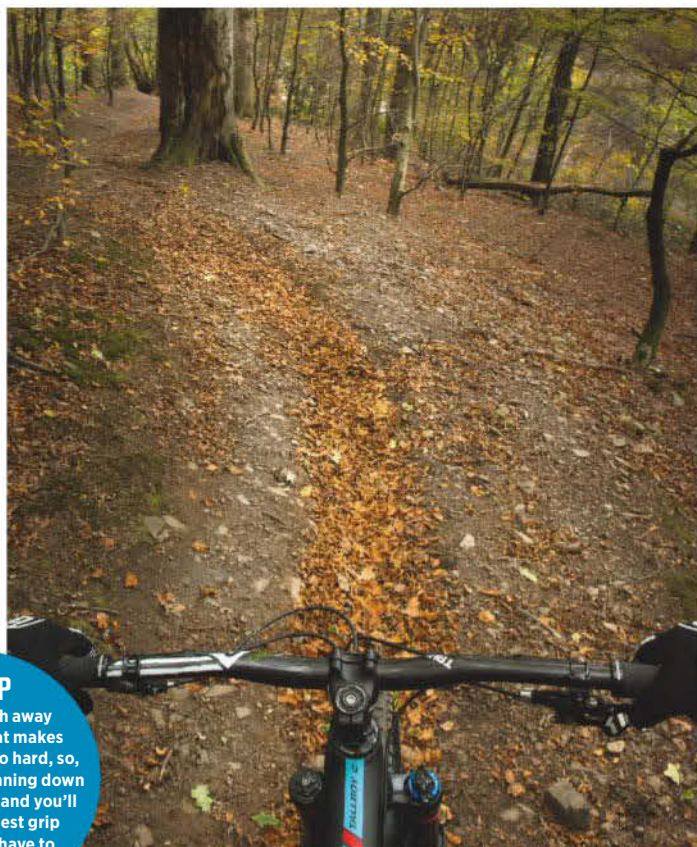
With variable conditions come less grip and more sliding, so your lines might become a little more vague and blurred around the edges. This is something that spooks a lot of riders. It's actually pretty liberating to forget the detail under your wheels and concentrate only on the substantial objects and obvious shapes, but with everything caked in mud, covered in leaves or under water, what do you look for?

In previous months we've discussed how compressions, banks and cambers can be used as berms, to catch you and to gain traction. Now, if you think about it, where do water and leaves collect? In those very same compressions and ruts. This means that you'll need to keep your wits about you, and gauge the depth of any filled holes, and whether there are hidden objects in them. But, as a general rule of thumb, rather than lose balance and grip trying to go around these filled-up dips, aim directly for them.

Just think of your favourite steep chute. I bet that there's a catch rut at the bottom that keeps you upright and let's you turn the corner; I also bet that this rut holds leaves and water in the winter. So why not use this as a clue to find good but hidden shapes elsewhere? You might just find that you start to find grip where others are struggling.

TOP TIP

Water will wash away the soft slop that makes riding in the wet so hard, so, if there's water running down the trail, follow it and you'll likely find the best grip too. You'll just have to accept you'll get a bit wet



ANGULATION

In the winter, as with line choice, you have to stretch boundaries and exaggerate the edges of everything you do, and that includes how far you move your body above your bike. As the bike slides and squirms to find grip, you need to let it go, and to do that you need to find even more movement in your hips and knees than you might usually. This is nothing new, and the simple lightning bolt shape your body should be forming in most corners —

with outside knee pushed towards the top tube, heels down and hips twisted to face your preferred direction of travel — should remain the same, although you might just have to exaggerate a little more.

Remember that your body movement and the movement of your bike are intrinsically linked. As the bike moves, your body should too. A common mistake is to move your body to a fixed position for a certain situation, but

riding a bike isn't like that. How much you move, and at what speed, needs to correlate with how much grip you have, how big the compression is, and how far the bike is sliding.

This is a symbiosis that relies on feel — something that will come with experience. The important thing for winter riding is that you become aware of this grey area and allow yourself to loosen your grip and dance to the tune of the bike once in a while.

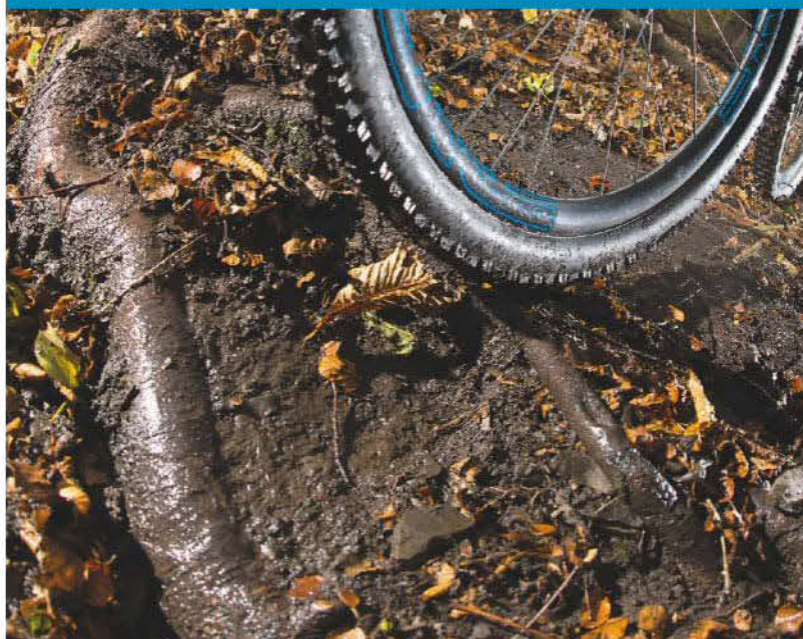
WET ROOTS

Roots are arguably the single biggest challenge in winter, and are often the sole ingredient that turns your favourite flowing forest singletrack into a slippery hell. Forget braking, forget control and forget being lazy when you're faced with a carpet of slick roots. Add the mud that often gets dragged over them by other riders and you'll have a whole new level of grease.

The trick to taming wet roots is not to find a route around them, but to identify them as early as possible, and then prepare for the inevitable reduction in grip. But how can you plan to lose grip? Simple — by admitting that you're about to slide, you can immediately stop

worrying about it and instead focus on where you'll regain control.

Hit the biggest roots as square on as you can. This will give you the best chance at getting over them. Keep an eye on the base of the trees beside the trail, as hotspots like these will often be where a root surfaces first, but keep in mind that from this point roots will likely descend into the ground, so you're always more likely to slide away from the base of a tree than towards it. Armed with this knowledge, you can now anticipate where the bike will slide, and identify spots where you can regain grip — right where the roots disappear and dirt has built up.



GET LOOSE, GET LOW

With your bike sliding sideways, mud flying everywhere, your hips moving and knees bending to deal with all this extra motion, you must remember to use every inch of body movement you have available.

Because the bike can go in any direction (hopefully predicted), you need to have built in the range of movement to allow it all to happen. By pre-empting what's coming up, and the likely amount of arm and leg straightening and bending you'll need, the result will be even more stability amid the chaos. Consider the following example.

This image (right) is interesting for one reason: I'm approaching a small drop over some big, slippery roots. The exit (out of shot) is flat, covered in leaves and saturated with water. Most riders see this image and think "go off a drop, move your weight back". But that's not what's happening. I'm not moving back and down because I'm going off a

drop, I'm moving back and down to build in a huge amount of movement in my knees and elbows to allow me to extend into the space ahead. And because I know I'm going to land and then slide, I need even more movement available than normal, and that means an even more exaggerated position as I head off the edge. I'm crouching to permit the subsequent extension.

Could I have rolled off this drop in a more upright position? Yes, but if I landed and slid, I wouldn't have enough extension in my limbs to accommodate it. So to deal with these wild conditions, I need to get into slightly wilder shapes. It's just like riding in the dry with everything turned up to 11.

The more you understand the importance of positioning, the more your riding will improve and the more you'll enjoy those soaking wet days when you can just let it all hang out and get a little sideways.





GET LOOSE, GET SIDEWAYS!



Now for the best part of winter riding: the complete loss of grip and the sideways drifts that come with it. We mentioned increasing and exaggerating your movement, from your feet to your hips and knees. Sometimes, though, that just won't be enough and you'll need to move even more. The question is, how?

Your fallback here is to take your inside foot off. Hang it out for stability, but do your best to keep it off the ground. More often than not, riders stamp their foot on the ground as a last-ditch save, and while unavoidable sometimes, this is not the safest thing to do. Equally, a hard stomp will stand you upright again and you will lose that finely balanced, lent-over slide.

Keep your eyes on the direction you want to go and counter-steer towards it. Nine times out of 10, your back wheel, even when at almost 90°, will eventually follow your front. It takes a certain amount of confidence to let it all hang out and commit to greasy corners, but if you get into the spirit of it and are comfortable with the loss of control, you'll find that your cornering will improve in all conditions.

NEXT MONTH

The spotlight shines on all the skills for riding at night

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This month's routes

WHERE TO RIDE AND EXPLORE

01 HARD ROUTE

LONG MYND, SHROPSHIRE

31.8km (19.8 miles)

Long Mynd riding has two rewards. Mostly it's about the singletrack descents that drop into the ridgeline's east-facing valleys. Natural, flowing trails pull you in at the top and spit you out at the bottom, itching to do it all again. But the views from the top are some of the best in the UK, too, stretching all the way across to Wales.

The start — which features a long climb, initially on tarmac and then on fire road — sets you up for what to expect. The singletrack sections are very sweet, but short. You've got to earn them, and the first climb is a stark reminder of how much elevation gain there is on this relatively short loop.

Once you're up top, though, it all starts to make sense. The scenery is stunning on a clear day and the first descent into Carding Mill Valley isn't far from the top of the climb. The National Trust tea shop at the bottom is a great place to stop for tea and cakes if you've started late or already worked up an appetite, and then it's more singletrack and bridleway back up and over the golf course to the top of the hill.

The final descent into Minton Batch is a peach, and well worth all the effort to get there. Although it's completely 'natural' and not designed for bikes at all, it's hard to believe that a trail-builder could have done a better job. Fast and flowing with some tight turns and a few little challenges to keep you on your toes, you'll get to the bottom wanting to ride it all again.

■ Download the route for free at po.st/mynd

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stunning views
aplenty in Shropshire



02 EASY ROUTE

BEACON BATCH, MENDIP HILLS

12km (7 miles)

If you want a quick taster of what Mendip riding is all about, look no further. This is a perfect quickie for an evening or half-day, or even as a stop-off when you're heading to the Quantocks, Exmoor or Dartmoor. It's short enough but still quite tough, with some techie ups and downs and some great high-speed cruising. If you can clean the start to the ridge you can consider yourself a climber and if you can clean the long traversing singletrack at the end, including the dips into the two Swallets, then you're definitely a decent all-rounder.

03 MEDIUM ROUTE

LANGDALE, LAKE DISTRICT

25km (16 miles)

There are so many quality trails in this part of the Lakes, it's really about putting them together to make a flowing and coherent ride. This is a stonker. After hurdling Loughrigg Fell on a well-worn path, it gets a good helping of height in the bag on tarmac. Doing it this way means that from Knipe Fold onwards, it's action all the way with some great techie riding interspersed with the odd short climb. The real highlight is the drop to Chapel Stile — roots and rocks to contend with here — and the scenic cruise along Loughrigg Terrace to finish.

04 HARD ROUTE

BOLT'S LAW, COUNTY DURHAM

36km (22 miles)

The County Durham moors seem to sit in a bit of a no-man's land between the Dales and the Cheviots. And therefore they see a lot less tyre tracks than either. Shame, because the riding is absolutely superb, as this little outing demonstrates nicely. It's a ride of two halves really. The first, a road cruise to Blanchland paid back with some fine moorland tracks into and out of Slaley Forest. And the second, the definite highlight, a long road climb followed by some superb moorland singletrack. The blast back to the finish is fun, too.

**MEDIUM
ROUTE**

LANGDALE, LAKE DISTRICT

25km (16 miles)

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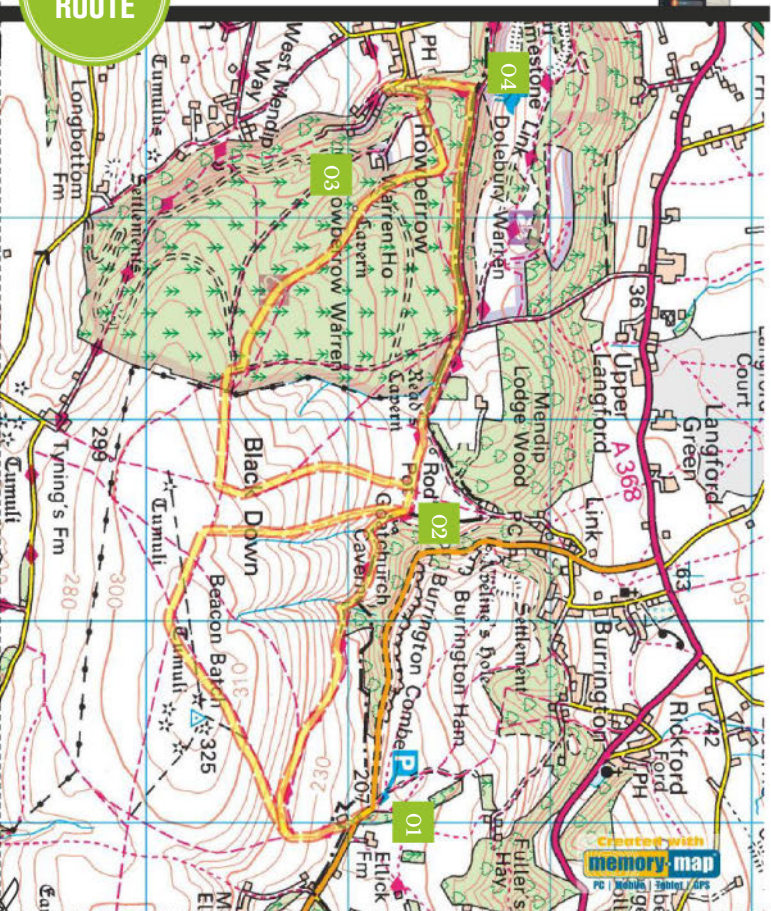


**EASY
ROUTE**

BEACON BATCH, MENDIP HILLS

12km (7 miles)

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**HARD
ROUTE**

LONG MYND, SHROPSHIRE

31.8km (19.8 miles)

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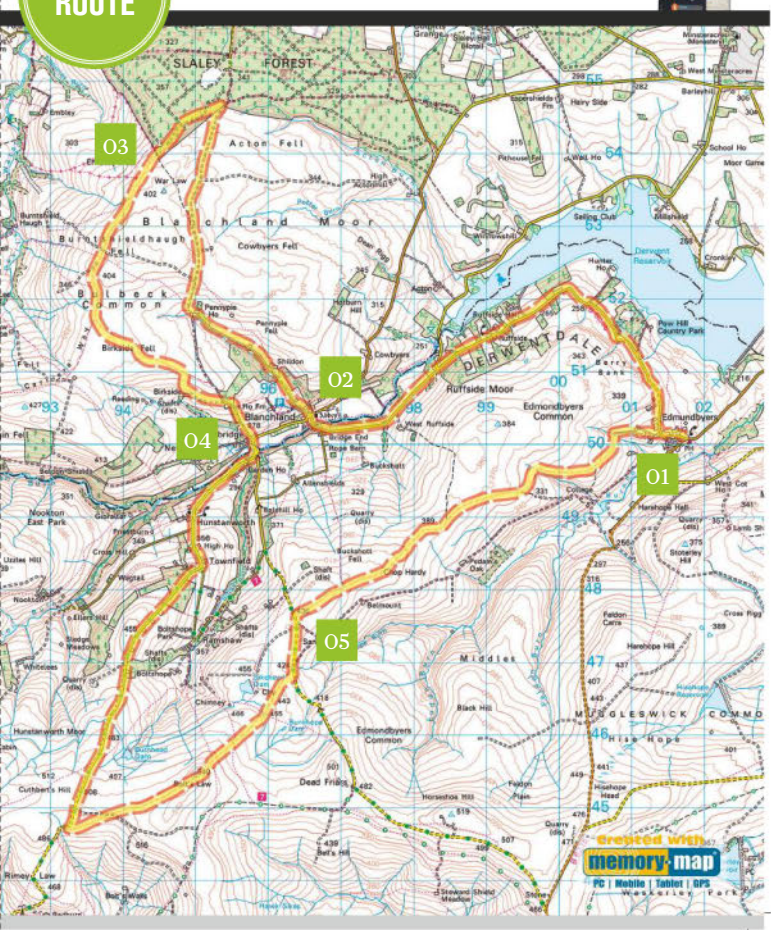


**HARD
ROUTE**

BOLT'S LAW, CO. DURHAM

36km (22 miles)

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EASY ROUTE

BEACON BATCH, MENDIP HILLS 12km (7 miles)



WAY TO GO

01 **START (OS182/ST489581) Car Park, B3134**
L out of the car park then R onto a stony track by a house. Climb to the moorland and turn R then fork L to continue climbing on a waymarked BW that leads up onto the ridge-top ignoring a L at half height. Keep SA across the main, red-coloured track and then take the first R to double back and cross this main track again. Now ignore the 1st R and take the 2nd. Ignore a tight R and take the 2nd (on a LH bend). Now drop down to a T-junction at the bottom.

02 **(ST474583) Junction on Black Down. Distance so far: 3.3km**
Turn L onto the main track then L again to climb steeply up. Go SA a X-roads near the top and then turn R at the next X-roads to a gate at the entrance to the wood. Go through and SA for 100m then turn R onto a broad track (Lower Langford). Take this and turn immediately L to drop down to a X-roads. Keep SA to another junction with a good track on a bend.

03 **(ST489581) Junction in Rowberrow Warren. Distance so far: 6.2km**
Turn L and then immediately R and drop for another 400m to a X-roads where you keep SA (slightly to the L) to climb a short ramp (easy to miss at speed) to a junction. Continue to a T-junction and turn R (Rowberrow). Drop to a drive and turn sharp R past a pink house to a gate. Keep SA down a rough-walled lane to a T-junction.

04 **(ST453586) Junction near Dolebury Warren. Distance so far: 7.6km**
Turn R for a stony climb then turn R at the top then L to continue to a gate that leads onto open moorland. Keep SA, ignoring turnings to the L and R, to join a narrow track through the bracken and cross a stream. Stay on this for 2km, passing the turning that you came out of earlier and dropping twice to cross deep valleys. Continue to the gate you came out of earlier and turn R for a technical descent to the road and finish.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 12KM (7 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 450M (1,476FT)



GETTING THERE

Start in the lay-by at the top of Burrington Combe, close to Ellick House (OS182/ST489581). This is best approached by taking the A638 east from the traffic lights at Churchill and then turning R onto the B3134 that leads up the combe. Rail isn't really an option.

BEST TIME TO GO

Boggy during the winter and head-high bracken can be a pain in late summer. Spring and autumn work best.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Region 1
OS Landranger Series (1:50,000)
182 Weston-Super-Mare
OS Explorer Series (1:25,000) 141 Cheddar Gorge

Rough Ride Guide to the South West by Max Darlings (roughridersguide.co.uk)

South West Mountain Biking by Nick Cotton (Vertebate Graphics)

REFRESHMENTS

Bring sarnies.

FACILITIES

Great pub: the Crown at Churchill, is close to the traffic lights on the A38/A638 (ST446596).

Broadway House in Cheddar for a real mtb-friendly campsite.

Bad Ass Bikes bike shop near the start, badassbikes.co.uk

Youth Hostel at Cheddar, 0845 371 9730, yha.org.uk

B&B in the New Inn, Priddy, 01749 676465.

Plenty of other B&Bs in the area.

Cheddar TIC, 01934 744071.

OTHER OPTIONS

There's a hard from this area in April 2014. Or some cheeky stuff in the woods around Rowberrow.

MEDIUM ROUTE

LANGDALE, LAKE DISTRICT 25km (16 miles)

WAY TO GO

01 **START (OS97/NY364059) Rydal Water Car Park**
Ride back out to the road and turn R. Follow this for 2km to a waymarked BW on the R (cattle grid) and now climb steeply past Brow Head Farm and on to Loughrigg Fell. Continue SA to the top and stay on the main track eventually following a wall on your L. Keep SA where another BW forks L through a gate and continue to a broad track. Keep SA along another broad track to the road and turn R and then L to drop steeply to the A593.

02 **(NY344045) A593 Skelwith Bridge. Distance so far: 5.5km**

Turn R onto the A593 (Coniston) and then turn L after the bridge by the Skelwith sign. Climb to a turning R (Hawkshead) and climb to T-junction where you turn L for 200m then R again. Continue to X-roads by the Drunken Duck and turn R then continue for another 2km to Knipe Fold. Pass a triangle and turning on the L and then, opposite another, turn very sharp R onto a steep ramp.

03 **(NY341994) Knipe Fold. Distance so far: 10.5km**

Follow this superb undulating track for 4km to the A493. Turn R and then L and then climb then drop to High Oxen Farm. Keep SA through a gate and climb then drop to a T-junction at the hamlet of Hodge Close. Sink L, R through the houses and then turn R through a gate and drop to a junction BW that descends through the slate and keeping R at a fork to a bridge. Continue up to a junction. Turn R and follow the track to bridge/ford.

04 **(NY315029) Bridge near Little Langdale. Distance so far: 16.4km**

Cross the river and follow the track up to the road. Turn L to climb to a junction on top of the hill and turn R, (challenging cycle path to Ambleside). Climb and then drop to a wood and gate. Go through a fork L to climb steeply for a few metres then drop steeply to a track. Cross and continue to a drive. Turn R then L to continue down to the slate quarry. Keep R then L (buildings on L) then follow signs down a narrow BW to a bridge in Chapel Stile.

05 **(NY322052) Chapel Stile. Distance so far: 19.6km**

Turn L then first R and R again to start the long climb to High Stile. Keep L at a junction and pass the YHA before turning L at the top. Now take a BW on the R (Loughrigg Terrace and Rydal) and follow this down, passing above Grasmere and then dropping to the shores of Rydal Water – care is needed on this section as it is narrow and often very busy. Keep ahead, around the rocks, and then stay on the main track as it climbs slightly to a gate before dropping to the car park.

**TOTAL DISTANCE: 25KM (16 MILES)
TOTAL ASCENT: 940M (3,084FT)**



GETTING THERE

The route starts from the Rydal Water Car Park (OS97/NY364059), just a few miles outside of Ambleside. The best approach is via Kendal and Windermere from junction 36 of the M6. Rail isn't a great option.

BEST TIME TO GO

Superb, mainly stony, year-round trails that are generally sheltered enough to ride in any weather. The Loughrigg Terrace trail that runs above Grasmere and Rydal Water gets very busy.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Region 4
OS Landranger (1:50,000) no. 97 Kendal & Morecambe
OS Outdoor Leisure Series (1:25,000) 7 The English Lakes South East
Harvey Superwalker (1: 25,000) Lakeland South East

Lake District Mountain Bike Routes by Tom Hutton (Out There Guides)

REFRESHMENTS

Wainwright's Inn at Chapel Stile is close to the end and perfect for a quick refuel. Or there's the Three Shires Inn at Little Langdale.

FACILITIES

Plenty of pubs, cafes and sandwich shops in Ambleside.

The route goes past the Youth Hostel at Elterwater, 0845 371 9017, yha.org.uk

Excellent B&B not that far away in the Church House Inn at Torver, 015394 41282.

For bike spares or even just good route advice try Bike Treks at Ambleside, 015394 31505.

Ambleside TIC, 015394 32582.

OTHER OPTIONS

We ran an Easy on the other side of Ambleside in the September 2014 Issue. Grizedale's not far away.

HARD ROUTE

BOLT'S LAW, CO. DURHAM 36km (22 miles)

WAY TO GO

01 **START (OS87/NZ013497) Edmundbyers**
Turn L up the hill and L again to climb to another junction, where you turn L again (SA) to take the B6303 towards Blanchland. Follow the road for 9km and you'll eventually drop into the village. Keep SA at the X-roads through the village and to climb away, still on tarmac.

02 **(NY965504) Blanchland. Distance so far: 7.4km**

This soon turns to dirt and leads to a gate that leads onto open moorland. Keep SA (Ladycross, Burnt Shield Haugh), to follow the wall to another gate. Now stay with this track as it crosses the moor before dropping into Slaley Forest. Take the first L and follow the forest track around. Keep your eyes open for a very faint trail to the L and take this to a gate (if you reach the fence still on the major track, you've missed the turn).

03 **(NY944540) Gate on edge of Slaley Forest. Distance so far: 14.3km**

Keep SA (not L) for 10m to a fork and keep L to take singletrack through the heather. Continue up through a gate and keep SA for another 1.5km to another gate. Go through this and continue SA for 300m to a fork. Turn L to climb slightly and then drop to another gate. Keep SA to descend to a wall corner and turn L to keep the wall to your R. Continue to a gate on the L, with a wall ahead, and go through this to join a clear track coming in from the L. Turn R onto the track and follow it out onto a tarmac lane that drops steeply down to Baybridge.

04 **(NY958500) Road at Baybridge. Distance so far: 19.7km**

Turn R onto the road and cross the bridge before turning R towards Rookhope. Climb for 5.5km and cross a cattle grid at the top. Then bear L (actually a Bridleway not Footpath) and follow this to a fork where a marker points you L towards the top. Go through a gate and follow the singletrack descent down to the road. Turn L and then after 800m turn R onto a broad waymarked BW.

05 **(NY963477) BW/Road Junction. Distance so far: 30.0km**

Follow this easily down to a fence and bear R then L through a gate, to continue on a good track. Keep SA through the next gate and continue SA on a rough track that descends to another gate in a corner. Keep SA to a ford and join a clear track that leads back into Edmundbyers. Turn R to retrace your outward route back to the car park.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 36KM (22 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 720M (2,362FT)



GETTING THERE

Start in a lay-by on the B6278, just south of Edmundbyers (OS87/NZ013497). The road links Stanhope and Consett so the route could be approached from north or south easily. No hope with rail here really.

BEST TIME TO GO

served dry so avoid particularly wet periods – essential for the sake of the trails as well as your legs and lungs. It's all pretty exposed up there so check weather forecast before leaving.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Region 4
OS Landranger Series (1:50,000) 87 Hexham & Haltwhistle
OS Explorer Series (1:25,000) 307 Consett & Derwent Reservoir

Guidebook: Beyond Hamsterley by Neil Gander

REFRESHMENTS

Take sarnies or detour back to the Lord Crewe Arms or White Monk taverns in Blanchland from point 3.

FACILITIES

The Lord Crewe Arms at Blanchland is excellent and only a few miles from the start.

The White Monk tearoom also at Blanchland is also excellent.

For more choice, try Stanhope.

B&B in the Lord Crewe Arms, 01434 675469, lordcrewearmsblanchland.co.uk

Corbridge Tourist Information Centre, 01434 632815.

OTHER OPTIONS

We brought you a sweet Easy on nearby Hexham Common in the Oct 2011 Issue. Or there's Hamsterley Forest.

HARD ROUTE

LONG MYND, SHROPSHIRE 31.8km (19.8 miles)

WAY TO GO

01 **START (OS137/SO441898) Car park at Shropshire Hills Mountain Bike Centre, Marshbrook**
Turn R out of car park and head up B4370 for 2km. Turn R on minor road to Hamperley and continue SA to pick up fire road climbing into forest. Climb for approx. 2km through forest to open moorland at top.

02 **(SO403907) Moorland south of gliding club. Distance so far: 6km**

Bear R and pick up BW crossing gliding club runway. Watch out for gliders and beware crossing the tow cable. Cross cattle grid at club entrance and bear R onto minor road. Follow road (marked Jack Mytton Way on map) for 2km, then bear L onto smooth hardpack BW past trig point. Follow for 1.5km past summit.

03 **(SO427958) Mott's Rd/ Carding Mill Valley junction. Distance so far: 11.9km**

Turn R and pick up BW for Carding Mill Valley. Follow fast track 2km DH into valley. Caution needed – very popular tourist / walker spot. Tea shop on R in car park at bottom of descent. Continue SA through car park and pick up obvious trail climbing to L. Ride through golf club, following BW signs. Turn R at top of climb and descend steeply into valley.

04 **(SO452954) The Batch. Distance so far: 16.8km**

Turn L and follow gravel road for approx. 1km, then double back on BW to climb out of valley up to minor road. Turn L and continue SA for 1km, then L onto track along ridge. Retrace steps towards gliding club. Near club entrance turn L to descend Minton Batch. At bottom of descent turn L onto road then bear R in Minton to return to Marshbrook.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 31.8KM (19.8 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 859M (2,819FT)



GETTING THERE

There's a station in Church Stretton – services run between Hereford and Shrewsbury. By car, take the M6 to Birmingham, then the M54 and A5 past Telford, towards Shrewsbury. The A49 heads S from Shrewsbury – Church Stretton is approx. 15km from the A5 junction.

BEST TIME TO GO

Long Mynd trails are well-drained, so they're rideable year-round. However, the valley descents are joined by an exposed ridge and are best avoided in foggy or very wet and windy weather.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) 137 Church Stretton and Ludlow

OS Explorer (1:25,000) 217 The Long Mynd and Wenlock Edge

REFRESHMENTS

Church Stretton is awash with pubs, cafes and tea shops, but the best place to stock up during the ride is at the National Trust tearoom in the Carding Mill Valley car park, 01694 725000.

FACILITIES

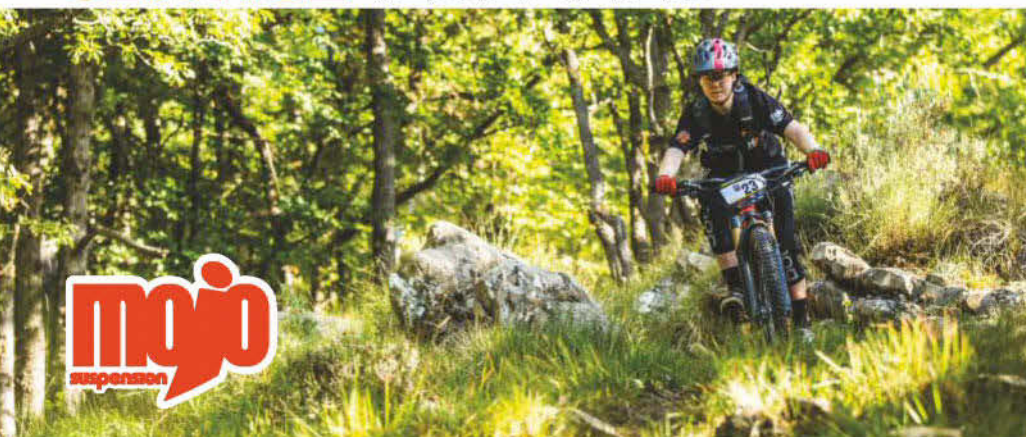
The Shropshire Hills Mountain Bike and Outdoor Pursuit Centre, just down the road from Church Stretton in Marshbrook, has a car park, bike shop, bike washing facilities, on-site camping and a pub next door for post-ride refuelling, 01694 781 515, mtb-shropshire.co.uk

Church Stretton has the usual range of B&Bs and eateries. More information from the Visitor Information Centre, 01694 723133, churchstretton.co.uk

OTHER OPTIONS

Hopton Woods is a short drive from Church Stretton and is a popular spot with local riders, offering trails to suit most abilities. There's more info on the Forestry Commission website,

SERVICE REDEFINED



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Q&A

THIS MONTH: THE PERFECT BIKE
CLEAN, MISBEHAVING GEARS,
FORK REBOUND ADJUSTMENT

THE BIG QUESTION

How do I clean
my bike properly?

Q I've had my new bike for about six months now and I'm embarrassed to say I've never cleaned it! The weather has been good so it hasn't ever got really dirty, but winter is drawing in and I'm going to have to do it sooner or later. What's the easiest way to deal with it and what kit do I need?

Keith Finch, via email

A We're all slack once in a while Keith, but it's good sense to get into a routine of cleaning. For starters your bike will look better, and we all love riding a shiny new toy right? It will also work more efficiently and last longer. It's pretty obvious that when covered in clag the suspension seals and chains work less efficiently and also wear out quicker. Part of the cleaning job is re-lubrication. Chains and derailleurs shift more smoothly and fork and

shock seals keep out dirt and move with less stiction if they are lubed properly.

Another often-overlooked aspect of bike cleaning is that it allows you to get up close and personal with your steed. This is particularly true of the brush and bucket method that we recommend here. It's during this time that you might spot something that saves you from a mechanical or worse, an accident when out on the trail. There might be a loose or missing pivot bolt, a damaged chainlink or even a crack in the frame that would have otherwise gone un-noticed, right up until breaking point. Sod's law dictates that it usually either fails at the furthest point from home or just as you are sailing over that tricky drop you've been trying to nail for ages. So give yourself peace of mind and do your bike a favour, grab a bucket and get scrubbing.

Use a hosepipe with care:
it can do more harm
than good

YOUR
EXPERT

AL VINES

Tech manager for i-ride. Born with Allen keys in his hand, Al loves a challenge. Just don't ask him to get on a chairlift; he prefers solid ground.



BUY THE RIGHT CLEANING PRODUCTS

There is a minefield of cleaning products out there and you can easily end up spending money on stuff that is unnecessary — dental floss for your bike anyone?! What you do need is pretty simple — clean water, a bucket, a gear-cleaning brush for the nooks and crannies (like cogs and sprockets) a good-sized brush for the rest of the bike and some cleaner — one that doesn't have an adverse effect on your disc brakes.

If you really let your cleaning regime slide or you over-lubricate, you may need some degreaser too. Once clean, you will need a few more bits to finish the job properly — water-displacing spray to use

prior to proper lubrication, lubricant for your chain and thicker lubricant for your mechs. Wiper seals on suspension components and dropper posts all need lubricating too; you can use specific sprays (expensive and not that effective), wet lube (universal and cheap), fork oil (cheap and effective) or specific seal lubricant (very effective but very expensive). Don't use water-displacing sprays like GT85 here.

If you want to polish the frame then automotive products are the best value and most effective, mud is less likely to stick to a shiny surface than a dull one.

THE 10
COMMANDMENTS
OF CLEANING

- 1 Don't clean your brakes with anything more than water and a clean brush.
- 2 Clean from the top of the bike and work your way down.
- 3 Pay particular attention to cleaning suspension seals and stanchions, but avoid spraying water at them directly.
- 4 Don't use a jet wash unless you don't mind paying for the consequences. If you do use a hose don't direct the spray at bearing-containing components — hubs, headset, BB etc.
- 5 Do clean your drivetrain until it's spotless — dirty chains wear quickly and worn chains lead to worn cassettes

AVOID THE JET WASH

At one time or another you'll have heard someone say or have read a warning sticker saying don't jet wash your bike. There's good reason for this — it will blast grease from bearings, spray water and grit past seals and generally shorten the lifespan of your bike and components. On the other hand it is the king of convenience. You might not benefit from the close-up inspection of a hand wash but you will have a spotless bike — tyres and all — in no time, and with minimal effort.

If you do succumb to the pleasures of the jet wash you need to be aware that this convenience will cost more money in the long run and probably mean the bike needs more spannering and tinkering as a result. When using a jet wash or hose, avoid pointing it at any bearings or seals — i.e. hubs, BB's, headsets, fork/shock and dropper-post seals.



and chainrings, which can become expensive if you're having to replace them regularly. Prevention is a lot cheaper than cure.

6 Do use a water-displacing spray such as GT85 on your mech pivots, but don't rely on it for lubrication.

7 Do dry and lubricate your chain and mech pivots and jockey wheels immediately after cleaning, but don't get any lube on your brakes.

8 Do lubricate suspension and dropper post seals with a proper seal lubricant, but don't think this means you can forgo regular servicing.

9 Do apply a coat of polish to your frame. Don't get it anywhere near your brakes (apply to a rag first then wipe it onto the frame).

10 Do all of the above regularly.

10MIN CLEAN



■ **4 MIN** Wet the bike down to soften any dried-on mud. Spray cleaner onto the bike and give it a few minutes to do its thing. Clean the bike from top to bottom. Make sure fork, shock and dropper post seals are spotless.



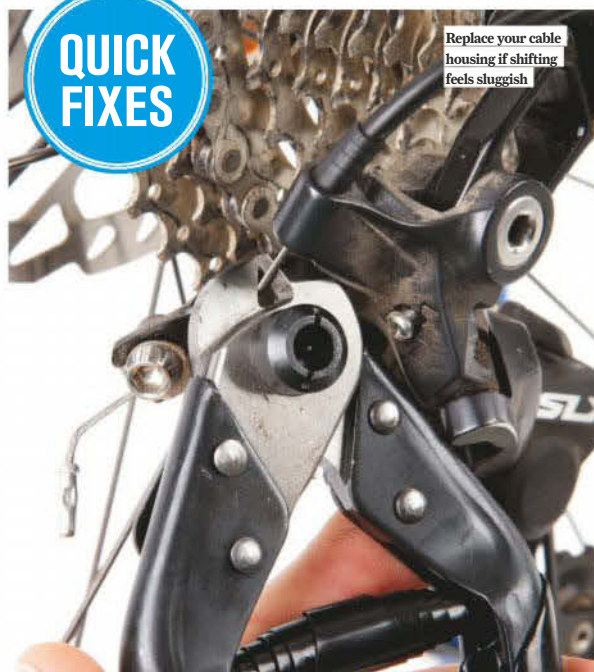
■ **4 MIN** Clean the drivetrain using your gear brush and more cleaner as required. Clean the brakes with plain water only and be careful not to transfer any oil from the gears. Keep your gear-specific brush for gear cleaning only!



■ **2 MIN** Dry the bike — if using water-displacing spray keep it just to the drivetrain. Bounce the bike on the back wheel, and tip it onto the front wheel to drain any water from inside the frame. Lubricate the chain and mechs. Lubricate shock, fork and dropper-post wiper seals — cycle them, wipe off any dirt, re-lube and remove any excess.

Got a question about fixing your bike? Email mbr@timeinc.com with 'Q&A' in the subject line

QUICK FIXES



Replace your cable housing if shifting feels sluggish

SHIFTING PROBLEMS

Q I've tried setting my gears up a few times now and I can't get them to index properly, it's driving me nuts! The bike is totally stock and fairly new. Nothing is worn out, bent or broken, it's just that the gears have slowly got worse and worse over the past 10 rides or so. What the hell is it?!

Phil, email

A If you're certain that nothing is knackered and that the gear hanger is properly aligned, then I'd bet it's the cable that's at fault. It's surprising how much of a difference a new one will make. Replace the inner cable and the last piece of outer that enters the rear mech as a minimum. Make sure the outer casing is long enough too; full-suspension bikes need extra length to accommodate the travel. Use quality cables — you won't go far wrong with Shimano — and there's a good chance it'll sort it. If not then you've only spent a few quid. Worn mechs can work OK with clean, fresh cables, but brand new ones won't ever work with old sticky, gummy cables — they are like the arteries of your bike!

FORK SET-UP

Q My fork feels like a pogo stick when climbing, I'm sure this isn't right. How can I tame it?

Rex Treherne, email

A Suspension forks do bob around while climbing,

but you can maybe calm it down by adding some low-speed compression and/or rebound damping to your fork if these are available adjustments. Look for the obvious labelling by a dial or check the owner's manual.

Increasing the rebound damping will slow the return of your fork after it has been compressed. Your fork should return quickly, but in a controlled manner without kicking back. Don't go too slow though or the fork will feel unresponsive and pack down, meaning it won't be able to extend quickly enough to take successive hits.

You can also tame this bobbing by adding more low-speed compression damping and/or engaging any lockout function when climbing. It's really important to pedal smoothly too because if you are stamping on the pedals and throwing your weight around on the climbs the fork will move excessively — you might need to compose yourself!



Compression damping's a balancing act

Replace a press-fit BB

Press-fit BBs are increasingly common on modern full-suspension bikes. Here's how to replace one

It looks like the press-fit bottom bracket (BB) is here to stay, for a while at least. Mechanically it seems like a pretty backward idea, but right now there are plenty of amazing bikes out there that run them, and if you've got one you should know how to fix it. When we say fix we actually mean replace, as that's all you can do. Although, if you're lucky enough to have a carbon steed, then repeated removal and fitting of a press-fit component is a bad idea. With this in mind you might want to invest in a high-end BB that has serviceable or replaceable bearings with the hope of extending service intervals.

In this step-by-step we're replacing the stock BB from a Stumpjumper Expert Evo 29er, which felt rough after just a few rides, with a Chris King unit with serviceable bearings. The procedure is the same for most manufacturers, but it's worth checking their recommendations, especially if you're working with carbon. While you're looking, make sure you've got all your dimensions right as there are different frame and crank variations that will affect your BB choice.



TOOLS FOR THE JOB

● Hammer and punch for removal. Some kind of press for fitting (be it homemade or more professional) — just make sure the press contacts the cups and not the bearings.

NEED TO KNOW

- **TIME TAKEN**
30 minutes
- **SKILL LEVEL**
Moderate
- **MONEY SAVED**
About £25
- **GOT INTO TROUBLE?**

This job is pretty simple, but you need to be confident with a hammer and punch or you risk damaging your frame. If you get stuck at any point then head to your LBS.

WATCH THE VIDEO

Watch a video tutorial by visiting po.st/BBreplace

YOUR EXPERT

AL VINES
Tech manager for i-ride. Born with Allen keys in his hand, Al loves a challenge. Just don't ask him to get on a chairlift; he prefers solid ground.



TOP TIP

If possible undo tight crank bolts by squeezing the tool and crank arm together as shown here — you're less likely to skin your knuckles!



01 Remove the driveside crank arm. With this SRAM BB30 chainset it's just a case of undoing the self-extracting bolt with an 8mm Allen key.



02 Remove any spacers and tap out the axle/non-drive side crankarm. Retain the spacers and note their orientation, as you may need them for use with your new BB.



03 Tap out the non-driveside (NDS) BB cup as shown. Work around the cup so that it comes out square to the frame.



04 Repeat for the driveside cup. This BB has the central sleeve permanently attached, so we used part of a BB press to spread the impact — a large washer will do the same job.



05 Clean the BB shell with a clean rag/paper towels and alcohol.

06 With this Chris King BB, the shims that sit inside the bearings need to be removed from both sides before fitting to prevent damage. You can use a screwdriver, but it's best to wiggle them out with a finger or thumb.



07 Installation methods differ depending on the frame manufacturer, but a coating of Loctite 243 is a pretty good bet on both carbon and aluminium frames. It's more secure than grease and less of a pain at removal time than epoxy.



08 Press the cups into the frame. This can be done one cup at a time (this is often easier) or as a pair — just make sure they go in straight. Use a proper press or make one out of some threaded stud, nuts and big washers. Here we use the proper Chris King adaptors (1 1/4in headset press adaptors) along with a Shimano TL-BB12 tool, but as long as you are pressing on the cups and not the bearings you'll be fine.

09 If you are working on a Chris King BB, re-fit the plastic shims to both sides.




10 Clean the chainset including the axle and spacers. Grease the axle including the splines and bolt thread.

11 Re-assemble the chainset into the new BB. With a SRAM BB30 chainset ensure that you have the pre-load collar on the NDS and that it is set to its minimum width (undo the pinch-bolt to enable adjustment). On the DS the same chainset should just require the 13mm spacer. Torque the bolt as specified — 48-54Nm for SRAM BB30.



12 SRAM's BB30 chainsets require you to take up any side-to-side play with the plastic pre-load collar on the NDS. Make sure the pinch-bolt on the adjuster is loose and then turn the collar in the direction of the arrow to increase its thickness until all play is eliminated. Nip up the pinch-bolt to maintain its adjustment.



Waterproof jackets

Stay warm and dry this winter with a good quality waterproof riding jacket. We've put 12 of the best at £150 through the wringer

Words & photos: Andy McCandlish

Waterproof jackets mean different things to different riders. Some choose a jacket they can pull on and wear all day, keeping the weather off whether the rain is actually falling or not. It keeps them warm and is an integral part of their autumn and winter wardrobe. Others demand a lightweight, packable jacket that only gets whipped out when the rain comes — then stashed away just as quickly when it stops — relying on windproof or thermal layers the rest of the time.

Once you've recognised which bracket you fall into, you need to decide how much to spend. Price has a large bearing on performance here — spend more and you will get a jacket with better breathability, fit and durability. And if it feels good on, you will enjoy your riding more, simple as that.

Around £150 is considered mid-range these days, but it is still enough to get you a jacket with very respectable performance. We pulled on 12 jackets of varying design around this price bracket and headed out into the dark, rain and wind.

USED AND ABUSED

How we test

With different requirements in mind we enrolled our usual band of testers from various branches of mountain biking. At one end of the scale we had outdoor instructors, basically living in these jackets day in, day out.

At the other end of the scale, several jackets did battle at the Trans-Provence enduro stage race, being stuffed into holdalls and ridden for eight hours a day through the mountains. A significant chunk of the test time was in fair weather but this really tests the moisture management and breathability of a jacket to the max. And when it did rain we were right out there on the hilltops thrashing around at every opportunity. In the end, our ratings reflected a combination of fit, practicality, weight and, most importantly, weather resistance.

Know your waterproof jacket

ADJUSTABLE CUFFS AND HEMS

Depending on the temperature you will want to either keep the draughts out or encourage them to flow through the jacket for cooling and moisture removal purposes. Adjustable cuffs and hems allow you to alter the sealing according to the conditions.



COLLAR

There is nothing more snug than the feel of a soft, fleecy collar. It adds weight and bulk, but for the comfort it is worth it. Tightening up a rustly, waterproof fabric against your skin just doesn't raise the spirits quite as much.

HOOD

Waterproofs never used to come with hoods — now it is hard to find one without. They are very handy when it comes to exposed hilltops and spells off the bike where they reduce windchill, keep wind off sweaty hair and stop draughts going round your neck. Make sure the hood fits over your helmet as you will rarely want to faff about taking it off if the weather is bad.

REFLECTIVES

Considering the only time you are likely to be wearing a waterproof is in poor visibility — rainy, foggy, dark — a bit of reflectivity could save your life. It doesn't need to be visible from space; just some low-key panels down the front of the sleeves or across the base of the back.



FABRIC

To some degree, every jacket these days is made from a breathable fabric. You could argue till the cows come home over which fabric has the best breathability, but at the end of the day jacket construction can have just as much influence. Pockets, seams and reinforcements all reduce breathability; getting rid of these features, adding some vents and even using a cheaper fabric can make for a comfortable ride. Consider also how much it will be used — would you be better with a heavier, more durable fabric?

VENTILATION

Using the collar, cuffs and hem to control air flow around the jacket is a good start, but extra ventilation — such as pit-zips and yoke vents (positioned across the back of the shoulders) — can make all the difference when it gets hot. These are especially important if the fabric isn't very breathable.



ZIPPS

Virtually every jacket on test here comes equipped with waterproof zips. Unlike a flap design, these allow for simpler construction methods and can be sewn or welded straight onto the fabric.



POCKETS

If the jacket is likely to do full-day ride service, pockets are handy. Tuck away GPS, bars, maps or whatever for easy access but be aware that pockets and other features generally affect the breathability of the jacket. Even if they are made from the same breathable fabric, the moisture then has an extra layer and seams to penetrate. If you can live without them and rely instead on stuffing belt pockets on your hydration pack, we'd recommend it.

FIT

Long sleeves and a dropped tail for coverage in the riding position are essential, but beyond that fit is down to personal choice. For pure performance a tight fit is preferable, keeping weight to a minimum and reducing wind drag. A looser fit with more pockets or comfort features is good for all-day wear, however.





ALTURA ATTACK 360

£149.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 564g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: blue, grey/flouro • Contact: altura.co.uk

With a combination of durable fabric on the main wear points, combined with softer stretch material on the elbows, neck and hood, the Attack 360 feels a little more mobile than many of the all-day weight jackets, but it is still rugged enough to shrug off heavy usage.

It has a good fit, an easily-removable hood and effective overhanging cuff shape. We liked it a lot, but it wasn't without fault. The removable hood is peaked, and made from stretch fabric, but it failed to cover our XL Poc helmet, and was more suited to fitting under the helmet. Also, while the React fabric is impressively breathable on paper, the placement of two large chest pockets created an area where moisture built up as we sweated. Two large zipped side vents help if the rain isn't too heavy, but a mesh back to the pockets would have reduced condensation in this key area. Finally the Lycra cuffs seemed a nice touch, sealing out the bulk of draughts, but once wet proved unpleasant and cold against the wrist, took ages to dry and eliminated the option of increasing ventilation up the sleeve — this jacket would be much better without them.



Removable hood with built-in peak



ENDURA MT500

£159.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 554g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: orange, black • Contact: endura.co.uk

Covered with zips, the MT500 is easily the most technical looking jacket of the line-up. Side pockets that double as mesh vents, pit zips, forearm pockets and a large hood with side perforations (to aid peripheral vision), all add up to a good looking bit of kit that oozes weather-beating confidence.

Being relatively heavy and bulky when packed down makes it more of an all-day garment; to put on before you leave the door and wear for the whole ride. The fit is loose, meaning you get the option to layer-up underneath, and we loved the roomy hood that easily pulled over our huge bonces — even if those perforations didn't exactly line up with our eye-level.

The fabric spec suggests it is very breathable, although all those zips, taped seams and pockets must be slightly choking its performance. However, generous venting, including small pit-zips and vast side vents — with two-way zips that allow strategic positioning of the opening — back it all up. When fully open, water can pour in, but used sparingly they help rather than hinder.

The MT500 shares similar Lycra cuffs to the Altura, but the difference here is that they are removable. It's a great idea, as it lets you fully remove them to improve the breathability.



MT500: zip-heavy technical performer



FOX DOWNPOUR

£165

SPECIFICATION Weight: 454g • Sizes: S-XL • Colours: green • Contact: foxhead.com

In terms of weight and packability, the Fox falls somewhere in the middle in this test. While not quite as tough as the heavyweights here, the Downpour shrugged off everyday scrapes and tumbles when enthusiasm got the better of talent for our testers. Employing a stretchy fabric that makes long rides more pleasant, it could happily function as your all-day, everyday waterproof.

Feature-wise, Fox has gone with a minimalist approach. Perhaps recognising that the fabric has below average breathability for the price, there's a large pair of pit zips down the sides and a flap-covered yoke vent between the shoulder blades. This meant there were few complaints about boiling in the bag from testers. Aside from the vents, there's nothing more than a pair of handwarmer pockets, a sleeve with an MP3 player compartment and a cable-routing hole.

At a pinch the stretchy hood can accommodate a helmet, which makes it worthwhile, but what brings a smile to our face is the rollaway facility in the collar that secures it and prevents it from inflating like a parachute when not in use. The collar could do with adjustment and a fleece lining for comfort, but overall the Fox worked well in showery — but not extreme — weather.



Downpour: simple but effective



Gore Bike Wear Power

£179.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 266g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: red/black, blue/black, yellow/black, green/black • Contact: goreapparel.co.uk

Gore, as always, seems to grasp more than anyone else that less is more when it comes to breathable waterproof jackets. Slim on features — there is just one small rear pocket — the Power is a straightforward, superbly-cut waterproof jacket that gets on with the job quietly and very efficiently.

One of our testers, returning to base after a hard training ride, called a few of us over to feel the jacket. The fabric down the front and inside the arms was bone dry, very impressive in itself but the back of the jacket was soaking inside with condensation where his hydration pack had blocked the moisture transmission. That is what the whole jacket would have been like without the membrane working. None of us had seen this level of breathability before, hence we were suitably impressed with this latest Gore Active fabric.

With the bulk of the jackets on test sporting hoods, we would have liked to have seen one here, but many people won't lose sleep over this omission. Instead, you get great fit, low weight, a minimal pack size, adjustable hems, cuffs and a comfortable fleece-lined collar to cinch up when the weather gets nasty.



Gore Active: super-breathable fabric



Madison Addict

£139.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 572g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: red, black, blue • Contact: madison.co.uk

At £140 for a durable, all-day mountain bike jacket with breathable three-layer fabric, the Madison Addict smashes a few price barriers. Although it sports a slightly slimmer fit than the Endura or Altura, we liked the cut from the off and it still offered freedom of movement and room to layer-up underneath. The fabric boasts a good spec, but intelligent use of forward-facing vents at the chest definitely helped moisture management, and with two-way zips you can adjust the gap around your pack's shoulder straps nicely.

Mesh-backed pockets and a lack of unnecessary features help with breathability, while adjustable hems, cuffs and neck let you seal the weather out when you need to.

The zip-off removable hood is handy if you want to use the jacket for different activities, as long as you remember to do it before setting out on a ride: putting it on or off on a wind-ravaged hilltop didn't prove to be a practical option. Unless you are double-jointed, you would need to take the jacket off, and that may not be either comfortable or safe in really foul weather. It was, however, a good size and easily cinched up over a helmet to provide extra protection when the weather was especially unpleasant.



Madison Addict: unbeatable value



Pearl Izumi Select Barrier WXB

£139.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 362g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: black/grey, yellow/black • Contact: madison.co.uk

The Pearl shares the Sugoi's soft feel, super-stretchy shell fabric and sleek, low-profile fit. Unfortunately the rubberised inner face of the fabric also shares the same damp and cold feel. No matter, once pulled on over a long-sleeve top — we wouldn't use it with short sleeves — you soon forget about it. In fact you rapidly forget you are wearing a waterproof at all.

On the bike, the snug fit is perhaps more akin to a road-specific garment, but it's undeniably manoeuvrable and pleasant to wear for longer periods on a mountain bike too. In fact, testers reported especially liking it on big days in the saddle, as long as the weather wasn't too bad; it can't handle really poor conditions.

While the asymmetrical cuffs that overhang the back of the hand extend protection, they lack Velcro adjustment. A popper-fixed drop-down tail helped keep off the worst of the spray, but the collar lacked adjustment and didn't keep out driving wind and rain.



Select Barrier: close-fitting all-day comfort



POLARIS GRANITE

£144.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 530g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: charcoal, titanium • Contact: polaris-apparel.co.uk

With a slightly lighter fabric than the other all-day style jackets on test, the Polaris instantly felt comfortable, especially compared to some of the less flexible jackets — such as the Race Face. Of course that means it needs a little more care, but the Ripstop fabric is more than rugged enough for most uses, and ultimately a good compromise.

Two large side pockets are mesh-backed and double as effective ventilators, helped by the two-way zips; you can perfectly place the vent gap around your pack straps. Thick silicon print on the shoulders secures pack straps firmly, but, while the hood looked big, it proved tight over our benchmark Poc helmet.

Initially cynical of the clear plastic watch window welded onto the left sleeve, we were won over in the end. It quickly steamed up when on the move but was easily cleared with a quick rub on the inner garment, and while testing a GPS watch it proved more than just a novelty.

A glasses wipe and mesh MP3 pocket inside the chest finish off the shortlist of features, but while we liked its uncluttered appeal, we did miss a fleece lining in the collar for long-term comfort.



Granite: it's time you had a watch window



RAB ATMOS

£170

SPECIFICATION Weight: 296g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: green, blue, grey • Contact: rab.uk.com

Touted as more of a multi-activity jacket than purely bike-specific, the Rab nonetheless grabbed a lot of attention among testers and proved to be an adequate performer in the wet. Like Gore, the Rab designers have gone light on the features to reduce pack size and weight. Pertex Shield+ is an amazingly light material, and combined with the minimalist design, makes this the lightest and most compact jacket on test.

The Atmos is perfect for those who get up to more than just riding, with enough room to move and layer-up for less aerobic activities. That does make it slightly baggy on the bike. The hood is excellent, with plenty of room to engulf our large helmets, and it has the luxury of a retention clip to allow it to be rolled away and stowed when not in use. Other manufacturers take note.

Breathability was excellent too, hindered only by two large side pockets that cover much of the torso area. All the necessary features like an adjustable and elasticated hem and cuffs are present as well. The bare essentials don't extend to a fleecy collar, but you're paying for a lightweight and minimalist jacket, so that's only to be expected.



Atmos: light, loose and versatile



RACE FACE TEAM CHUTE

£169.95

SPECIFICATION Weight: 546g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: yellow, black • Contact: silverfish-uk.com

With heavyweight fabric, a generous cut and reinforcement on the forearms for crashes and foliage parting, the Chute is ideal for the tougher side of trail riding. Weather protection is second to none, with plenty of room in the body and sleeves for freedom of movement and the addition of thermal layers, while adjustable cuffs and hems seal everything up nicely. A high, fleece-lined collar can be snugged up for protection and the roomy hood does a cracking job of covering even the largest of helmets.

Large pit-zips help with the less than breathable fabric and design — large front pockets restrict breathability on the torso — but overall it was still the least suited to hard, sustained exercise. If you want your jacket tough — and visible if you choose the safety yellow version that we had — and tend to do more hanging out and trail-building in the rain rather than actual riding, the Chute may very well suit you. It's a cracking jacket for wearing after a ride, but if you like to get out there for long, hard days, the lack of moisture-wicking may leave you feeling steamed up.



Chute: protective but over-clammy



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2014
Model

805 650b



6061 Hydro Formed T6 Aluminium, Custom Drawn, Multi Butted with Post Mount Dropouts Frame, SRAM PC 1031, 10 Speed Chain, SRAM X-7, Long Cage, 10 Speed Rear Derailleur.

WHYTE

£699.99

RRP £999.99

2014
Model

629 29er



6061 Hydro Formed T6 Aluminium, Custom Drawn, Multi Butted with Post Mount Dropouts Frame, SRAM PC 1031, 10 Speed Chain, SRAM X-5, 10 Speed Shifters.

GT

£419.99

RRP £599.99

2014
Model

Avalanche
Comp



Hydroformed 6061 T6 Aluminium Frame, Triple Triangle, Zerostack 1 1/8" Head Tube, KMC Z99 Chain, Shimano Alivio, SL-M430, Rapid Fire Shifters.

GIANT

£1399.99

RRP £1999.99

2014
Model

Trance 1 X 29er



Fox 32 Float CTD Evolution with 15mm thru-axle Fork, Fox CTD Evolution Rear Shock, SRAM X9 Type 2 Rear Derailleur, Shimano M446 Hydraulic Disc Brakes.

WHYTE

£1199.99

RRP £1699.99

2014
Model

T-129 29er



6061 T6 Aluminium Front Triangle with Tapered Head Tube and Alloy Rear Triangle with 142 Dropouts Frame, SRAM PC 1031, 10 Speed Chain, SRAM X-7, 10 Speed Shifters

GT

£799.99

RRP £1199.99

2014
Model

Zaskar 9R
Comp 29er



GT Speed Metal alloy Hydroformed Frame, KMC X10 Chain, Formula C1 Brakes & Brake Levers, Shimano Bottom Bracket, All Terra Colarado Saddle.

KONA

£1499.99

RRP £2198.99

2014
Model

Process 134



6061 Aluminium Butted 134mm Travel Frame, RockShox Sektor Silver Air Forks, RockShox Monarch R Rear Shock, Sram X9/ Shimano SLX, Shimano Deore Brakes

GIANT

£2999.99

RRP £4999.99

2014
Model

Glory 0



ALUXX SL-Grade Aluminium Frame, KMC X-10 Chain, SRAM X0 10 Speed Shifters, Avid X0 Trail Hydraulic Disc Brakes, Giant Contact AM Handlebars.

GIANT

£999.99

RRP £1399.99

2014
Model

XTC Comp
2 29er



Giant Composite Technology Frame, RockShox Recon Gold 29", 100mm Travel, Poploc, QR15, Tapered Steerer Fork, Shimano Deore Shadow + Rear Derailleur, Shimano M395, hydraulic disc, 160mm Brakes.

GT

£999.99

RRP £1499.99

2014
Model

Zaskar 9R
Elite 29er



GT Speed Metal alloy Hydroformed Frame, KMC X10 Chain, Formula RX Brakes & Brake Levers, Shimano SLX Bottom Bracket, GT Statement Grips.

KONA

£1999.99

RRP £2998.99

2014
Model

Process 134
Deluxe



6061 Aluminium Butted 134mm Travel Frame, RockShox Revelation RL Solo Air Forks, RockShox Monarch RT Rear Shock, Sram X7/Shimano XT, Shimano SLX Brakes

GIANT

£1199.99

RRP £2499.99

2014
Model

Anthem X
2 29er



RockShox Reba RL Solo Air 15mm thru-axle, OverDrive 2 steerer suspension fork, RockShox Monarch RT rear shock, Shimano M395 hydraulic disc brake, Giant S-XC rims and hubs.

GIANT

£1299.99

RRP £1849.99

2014
Model

Anthem 2
27.5



RockShox Reba RL Solo Air 15mm thru-axle, OverDrive 2 steerer suspension fork, RockShox Monarch RT rear shock, Avid Elixir 5, hydraulic disc brake, Giant P-XC rims.

GIANT

£999.99

RRP £1499.99

2014
Model

Anthem 3
27.5



RockShox Recon Gold RL Solo Air with 15mm thru-axle, OverDrive steerer suspension fork, RockShox Monarch R rear shock, Shimano Deore 2x10-speed drivetrain with hydraulic disc brakes, KMC X10 chain.

GT

£699.99

RRP £999.99

2014
Model

Zaskar 9R
Sport 29er



Hydroformed 6061 T6 Aluminium Frame, Triple Triangle, Zerostack 1 1/8" Head Tube, KMC X10 Chain, Shimano Deore, SL-M610, Rapid Fire Shifters.

GIANT

£1699.99

RRP £2499.99

2014
Model

Anthem
Advanced 2



RockShox Reba RL with 15mm thru-axle, Push-Loc, OverDrive 2 steerer suspension fork, RockShox Monarch R rear shock, Avid Elixir 7, hydraulic disc brakes, SRAM XT 20speed shifters.

All prices are correct at the time of going to press. See website for latest price updates and offers. Please see website for terms and conditions.

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TEST
WINNER!

mbr



SCOTT TRAIL MTN 20

£169.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 312g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: green/ blue, black, blue/dark blue, Orange • Contact: scott-sports.com

The Scott is the only jacket on test that attempts to bridge the gap between the lightweight packable and feature-laden all-day designs. While it is only just over 300g and the fabric is airy light, it still boasts a hood large enough to cover even the biggest helmet, a luxurious fleece-lined collar for comfort and a selection of useful pockets and vents.

More than the features, testers reported back getting on well with the fit — slim with little excess fabric on the body or arms, but with just enough room for heavier clothing underneath. The fabric was adequately breathable, and with mesh pockets and little in the way of excess seam tape to block moisture, we never found ourselves getting too wet inside. The collar is superb — high, easily snugged up to the chin and great for blocking out the worst of the weather even when riding — and all the entry points are adjustable for ventilation.

It's not cheap, but considering it can be stuffed into a corner of your hydration pack with ease and weighs virtually nothing, it is impressively capable. Drag it out when the weather turns and you have a good looking, intelligently-featured jacket with great weather resistance and fit.

10



Great Scott: the Trail MTN 20 does it all



SUGOI ICON

£159.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 456g • Sizes: S-XXL • Colours: black, green, blue • Contact: cyclingsportsgroup.co.uk

The Sugoi had a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde character. When first handled the fabric feels soft, stretchy and very pleasant to the touch. Turn it inside out, though, and the rubber-like membrane inside feels cold and wet — even when it isn't. When these are the very things you want to feel isolated from, it's not a good start psychologically.

As soon as you pull it on however, its character changes for the better. The super-soft and stretchy fabric fits snugly with zero restriction and the adjustable hem and cuffs are very comfortable and efficient — in short you could easily forget you were wearing a waterproof.

This should mean it is a no-brainer — pull it on at the start of the day and leave it. Unfortunately we found the breathability isn't quite up to that level of use, building moisture noticeably when our heart rate increased. Not hugely worse than others on test, but the snug fit kept the dampness in close. Pit-zips did help, but only until the rain forced us to close them again.

Feature-wise, the rollaway, detachable hood felt like a bit of an afterthought, and is most definitely for under-helmet duty only. A drop tail is cleverly held up by three magnets until needed, which makes it easy to deploy, and it did keep spray off.

7



Breathability was the Icon's downfall



VAUDE TIAK

£130

SPECIFICATION Weight: 304g • Sizes: S-XXXL • Colours: green, black, blue, red • Contact: vaude.co.uk

More than once the Vaude was described as the quiet man of the test. Slim on features, and coming in at a bargain price, it didn't catch the eye particularly, but what it did do was pack down very small and barely troubled the scales at only 303g. While light weight and packability is a good thing, there are a few basics issues. The collar is a good height and relatively snug-fitting, but we found the lack of a draw-cord meant it couldn't be cinched in to keep draughts out. There's also no fleece lining so there's nothing to prevent cold fabric contacting your neck.

All the access points are adjustable; with Velcro cuffs and draw-cord hem both doing the business. We scratched our heads over an odd Velcro strip along the back of the collar, until a bit of investigation revealed it was the attachment for an optional Spray Hood II that's available aftermarket. We didn't have one to try, though, and with such a small strip to attach by, we would be surprised if it was hugely effective. Strangely placed vents on the back of the arms didn't feel like they added any extra functionality either.

On the upside, for the environmentally conscious, Vaude uses Bluesign-certified fabrics, which means they are optimised for reducing environmental impact.

7



Velcro hood tab seems superfluous

Verdict

Having ordered the jackets mostly based on price rather than function, we quickly found the test split itself neatly into the two distinct categories we talked about earlier.

On one hand we had lightweight, stowable jackets with few features. Designed to be worn only in the event of rain, then just as quickly packed away when it cleared, they tend to be a bit too fragile for everyday mountain biking.

The Gore Power fell into this category, and we were blown away by its breathability even under the most demanding conditions. It isn't often you get to your destination and the inside of your waterproof is dry to the touch, it was certainly a new experience for us.

The Scott seemed to combine the best of both, boasting features more commonly found on heavier duty jackets, like the high-cut fleece-lined collar, selection of useful pockets and excellent hood. Built from Scott's own Dryosphere fabric, it was very portable, and with the collar pulled up over your chin, always felt ready for bad weather.

The next category was the heavier, more feature-laden jackets suited to being pulled on

The Scott seemed to combine the best of both. It was very portable and always ready for bad weather

at the start of a day and kept on through thick and thin. Of these we loved the rugged approach of the Race Face, but felt it was just a bit too over the top for everyday riding. The Endura was a firm favourite with some testers but most felt it went overboard with features — it is covered in waterproof zips to furnish pockets and vents and could feel a little stiff as a result. It was still an excellent choice though, just pipping the Polaris and Altura, which were also up there, thanks to tough yet flexible fabrics and a good cut for riding. At the end of the day we felt the Madison showed the best features of all of them — a great hood, nice fit and impressive moisture

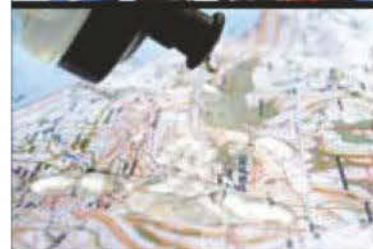
management — and that low price was a bonus.

Three jackets fell into no-man's-land — not as light as the lightweight, but not as weatherproof or durable as the heavy jackets. Instead they went for stretchy softshell all-day comfort. Of these the Pearl Izumi and Sugoi felt great but ultimately didn't offer enough protection if the weather really closed in. The Fox did better, with a hardwearing fabric and functioning hood, it was a great jacket for pulling on all day, just make sure to use those vents to keep moisture build-up to a minimum.

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Supercharged 29ers

Just as you thought the 29er bubble had burst, along come three hugely capable machines to breathe new life back into big-wheel shredding

Words: Alan Muldoon Photos: Roo Fowler





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WHYTE T-129 WORKS SCR

£3,099

BIKE TEST

The 29er had a difficult birth. A love-child of Californian kooks and progressive riders, born out of a desire to improve the humble mountain bike, it's taken more than 10 years for this unloved stepchild to reach maturity.

One product that's been pivotal in its recent development is the RockShox Pike. With stout 35mm upper tubes, lightweight 15mm lowers and smooth, controlled damping, it's guaranteed to supercharge any big-wheeler. Sharing the same chassis as the 160mm version, but with the travel reduced to 120mm, steering precision, confidence and suspension quality are at an all-time high.

Three bikes taking full advantage of the Pike's extra capability are the Orange Segment RS (£4,300), Specialized Camber Expert Carbon Evo (£4,500) and Whyte T-129 Works SCR (£3,099).

These short-travel shredders have a lot more in common than 29in wheels and a Pike fork, though. All sport between 110mm and 120mm of travel at the rear, all run SRAM's revolutionary 1x11 drivetrains and they all have dropper posts, wide bars and chunky tyres.

They are all fast too. With less travel than your typical trail bike, the response when you stomp on the pedals is almost

These bikes are way more capable than the suspension numbers suggest

instantaneous. Factor in the improved roll-over, stability and traction of the bigger wheels and these three bikes are way more capable than the suspension numbers initially suggest.

Bike manufacturers are a fickle bunch, however, and with all the love and attention now being bestowed on 650b bikes, they're close to throwing the 29er baby out with the bath water. These three cutting-edge trail bikes reveal why that should never happen. Forget hot-hatches, let's find out which supercharged 29er the real boy racers should be rocking.

CONTROL TYRES

To make the testing process as fair as possible we fitted Maxxis Minion DHF 29x2.3in tyres to all of the bikes in this test. Prices start at £29.99. maxxis.co.uk



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WHERE AND HOW

Tale of the test

Even during the initial shakedown rides in the Surrey Hills, we could tell this was going to be a tough test to call. And so, after weeks of blasting loamy turns and sending it on a fresh new jump trail, we packed the van and headed to the Forest of Dean to give the bikes a proper beating on some fast, rough trails. For the back-to-back test, we blasted round a quick loop of the Verderers trail followed by a more direct route back to the top for a couple of hair-raising runs of the Sheep Skull descent.



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ORANGE SEGMENT RS

£4,300

SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061 T-6 aluminium, 110mm travel
Shock RockShox Monarch RL
Fork RockShox Pike RCT3 Solo Air, 120mm travel
Wheels Hope Pro II Evo hubs, Stans Arch EX29 rims, Maxxis Minion DHF/High Roller II 29x2.3in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM X1 chainset, MRP 1x guider mech and X1 gears
Brakes Shimano XT 180mm
Components Renthal, Thomson, RockShox Reverb Stealth
Sizes M, L, XL
Weight 13.64kg (29.9lb)
Contact orangebikes.co.uk

GEOMETRY

Size tested L
Head angle 66.6°
Seat angle 70.9°
BB height 333mm
Chainstay 450mm
Front centre 735mm
Wheelbase 1,185mm
Down tube 707mm
Top tube 620mm
Reach 444mm

The Segment is a juicy new short-travel 29er from Orange. Packing 110mm of travel at the rear, it shares similar suspension numbers to Orange's first foray into big wheels: the Gyro. This latest 29er from Halifax, however, sees changes to the geometry and a distinct shift in attitude.

With a much slacker head angle, shorter head tube, improved standover clearance and increased range in the top tube, the Segment is squarely focused on trail riding — its genetic profile is now much closer to a Five than the bike that inspired it.

There are four models in the Segment range with prices starting at £2,500 for the Segment S. The RS version tested here is the flagship RockShox-equipped bike with a multitude of upgrades. For the ultimate in personalisation, however, Orange offers a wide gamut of colours, and you can even build your own Segment piece by piece with a frame-only option for £1,500.

All models share the same 6061-T6 aluminium frame, and, true to form, the Segment gets Orange's signature pressed and seam-welded monocoque down tube and swingarm, with the latter featuring 142x12mm dropouts and RockShox's latest Maxle design to improve stiffness. There's still no chainstay protector to save the paintwork, or your ears, from chain slap, though. Nothing fancy is needed here, and Orange could do a lot worse than simply copying Whyte's approach with some custom rubberised tape. Still, with the MRP 1x upper guide in place, you need never worry about dropping the chain.

SUSPENSION

Don't let the Segment's simple single-pivot

suspension fool you; it's a very effective design. Unfortunately, the RockShox Monarch RL fitted uses a less sophisticated damping circuit to produce a very firm lock-out. As a result, the back-end on the Segment doesn't fulfil its potential or, indeed, offer the same level of support as the fork. It's still incredibly plush — perhaps too sensitive even — and when sat down climbing this translates into increased shock movement, especially on rolling terrain. To combat this we upped the rebound damping slightly, but given the Segment's trail-riding credentials, we'd have much preferred to see a Monarch RT3 rear shock to better match the fork. Unfortunately it's one of the few shocks unavailable among the custom-build options.

COMPONENTS

Hope Pro II Evo hubs reinforce Orange's made-in-Britain ethos, and, just like the Segment frame, they are built to last. The £60 upgrade option to Maxxis tyres is great value and easily gave the Segment the best rubber on test. Some of the other upgrades available are questionable, though. The addition of the "Performance Pack", for instance, sees a perfectly good 800mm bar get replaced by a narrow 740mm Renthal FatBar Lite and matching Renthal grips. These rock-hard grips left us with pins and needles in our hands less than halfway round the less-than-taxing blue trail at the Forest of Dean.

PERFORMANCE

Given the high-end price tag it's relatively easy to pick holes in the spec on the Segment. But the fact remains that the harder you push the Segment the more it gives back. It's an increasingly rare quality

in a trail bike but it's one that will have you getting your foot out to drift corners and boosting off every blip on the trail. You'll also be blown away by how well this 110mm-travel bike manages to carry speed on rough terrain. Even when it gets a little wild, the Segment gives you the distinct feeling that, if you hold it wide open, you'll get through anything.

That's not to say the bike is without its faults, however. The back-end feels a little heavy, and it is — the rear wheel is 0.25kg heavier than that on the Whyte and it accounts for the entire weight difference between the two. Also, the rear shock really lacks the level of adjustment required to get the most from the suspension.

VERDICT

Fast, fluorescent and fun to ride, the Segment is another great bike that proves 29ers aren't just for mile-munchers. We loved how it railed corners and how the no-nonsense suspension design offered an engaging ride. The sizing is spot-on too, and there are more than enough spec options to keep everyone happy. Even the weight is competitive for an alloy bike. So what's not to like? Basically... the price! It's the only part of the Segment that's hard to swallow and only you can decide if being made in England is worth the extra coin.



WE LOVE

Classic Orange
ride quality
in a modern
package

WE HATE

How difficult
it is to make a
competitively
priced bike in
the UK

Rockshox Monarch RL
lacks adjustment

Fatbar slim: 740mm
just isn't wide enough

MRP upper guide
keeps the chain
on track

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The seatstays, shock yoke and upper FSR link use a co-pivot design to boost stiffness and reduce weight

The Camber Evo gets 120mm travel front and rear, 10mm more than the regular version

Shimano XT brakes with size-specific rotors mean that bigger riders get more stopping power

SWAT kit as standard means you'll be the go-to-guy when a multi-tool is needed

SPECIALIZED CAMBER EXPERT EVO

£4,500

SPECIFICATION

Frame Fact 9M Carbon/M5 aluminium, 120mm travel

Shock Fox Float CTD Factory w/AutoSag

Fork RockShox Pike RC 29 Solo Air, 120mm travel

Wheels Roval Traverse hubs, Roval Battie rims, Specialized Butcher/Ground Control 2.3in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM S-2200 carbon chainset, X01 mech, X1 shifter

Brakes Shimano XT 200/180mm

Components Specialized with Command Post IR

Sizes S, M, L, XL

Weight 12.5kg (27.6lb)

Contact specialized.com

GEOMETRY

Size tested L

Head angle 68.5°

Seat angle 68.5°

BB height 329mm

Chainstay 450mm

Front centre 717mm

Wheelbase 1,167mm

Down tube 706mm

Top tube 619mm

Reach 432mm

The Camber Expert Evo is very much a bike of two halves. Up front, it uses a beautifully formed Fact 9M carbon main triangle, with features that include full internal cable routing, a tapered head tube and a massively oversized PressFit 30 bottom bracket that ensures no effort is wasted when you stomp on the pedals. The M5 alloy rear-end is every bit as sleek with its 142mm dropouts and a moulded chainstay protector.

Where both halves of the Camber frame unite is where the Evo transformation happens. A longer-stroke shock pumps the travel up to 120mm, 10mm more than on the standard Camber, while the custom Evo shock yoke slackens out the head angle and lowers the bottom bracket. All in, it's a very different machine to the regular Camber.

The Evo concept is more pervasive than frame geometry and travel alone, however. A wide 750mm bar, chunky tyres and a dropper post are all standard issue on the Evo. You also get a Specialized SWAT kit which includes a bottle cage with attached multi-tool and a chain-breaker tool cleverly stowed beneath the headset top-cap.

SUSPENSION

This year RockShox has added an extra Bottomless Token to the 120mm-travel Pike 29er fork, bringing the total up to four. Not only does this make the fork more resistant to bottoming, it matches what we've been running in our own longterm test forks. The RC version on the Camber was easy to set up and probably all you'll ever need in terms of adjustability — we never used any of the additional features on the Pike RCT3 fitted to the Orange.



Thanks to Specialized's AutoSag feature, the rear shock on the Camber is even easier to dial-in than is the fork. The FSR suspension is very sensitive too, thanks to the shock yoke that eliminates one of the shock bushings. Combined with a well-tuned Fox Float Factory shock, the rear-end of the Camber tracks terrain better than any other bike in this test.

COMPONENTS

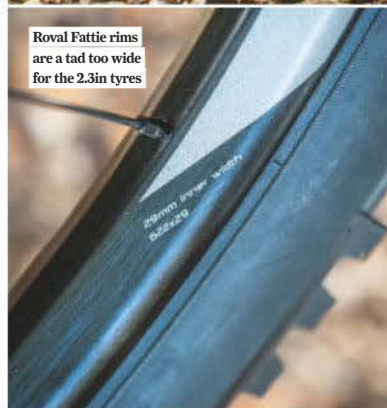
For 2015 Specialized has tweaked the spec on the Camber Expert Evo, the biggest change being a welcome switch



Fox Float Factory shock offers 120mm of supple travel

WE LOVE

It dispels the myth that 29ers aren't fun

**TEST
WINNER!****mbr**

Roval Fattie rims are a tad too wide for the 2.3in tyres



Command and control: new dropper post uses well-positioned lever

from Formula brakes to Shimano XT. Other refinements include a smaller 30t chainring on the SRAM 1x11 chainset to help keep weary legs spinning on big days out, and the Specialized Command Post now gets a new under-bar lever that's super-easy to use. More importantly, it's been upgraded from 100mm to 125mm of drop.

One slightly less apparent change is that the rim width has been pumped up to 29mm (internal) to offer improved tyre stability at lower pressures. We're not totally sold on this final change. Yes, we love how stiff the new wheels are, but because the wider rim gives the tyre a much squarer profile, it feels like you reach the limits of the side-knobs sooner when railing turns.

PERFORMANCE

After the first couple of shakedown rides on the Camber, we ditched the 70mm stem, as it seemed to be the limiting factor on steeper descents. We went all the way down to a 35mm before settling on a 50mm as the best compromise between reach, control and comfort for climbing.

With the cockpit sorted, the only things holding us back on the Camber were our skill and imagination. It's light enough to easily dispense with long-distance

marathon rides and lung-busting climbs, but it's also solid enough to smash any descent you point it down.

It has an unmatched ability to thunder through the roughest terrain but it's equally easy to pop it up over a stump, or get light and reposition the bike on the trail at a moment's notice. Granted, it doesn't have the straight-line stability of the Whyte's extra-long front-end, but the superior rear suspension and lower bottom bracket on the Camber ensure that trail speeds are higher on all but the steepest downhill.

WE HATE

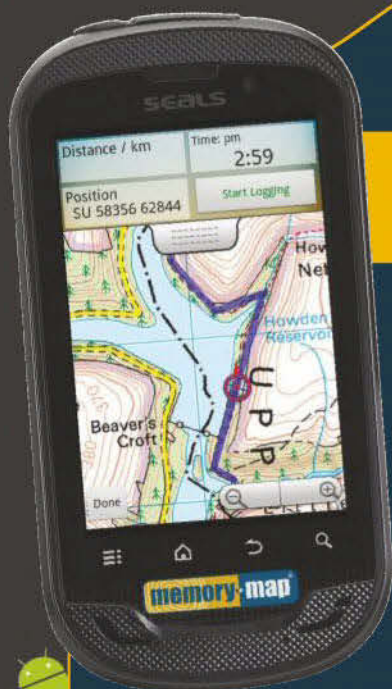
Needs a shorter stem

VERDICT

Once again, the Specialized Camber has proved that it's the short-travel 29er to beat. With 120mm of superbly composed travel it can be ridden as fast as many longer-travel trail bikes, but the tight, responsive reaction to pedal inputs and lightweight carbon front-end on the Expert model mean it has no problems hanging with the shaved-leg XC crowd.

Granted, an-out-and-out trail rider would probably benefit from the extra travel on the Stumpjumper, but the Camber Expert Evo is a great alternative for a racer coming up from XC, or anyone looking for a tighter-handling package to keep their skills razor-sharp.

10



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WHYTE T-129 WORKS SCR

£3,099

SPECIFICATION

Frame 6061 T-6 aluminium, 120mm travel
Shock Fox Float CTD Factory
Fork RockShox Pike RC 29 Solo Air, 120mm travel
Wheels SRAM Roam 40, Maxxis High Roller II/Crossmark 29x2.3/2.1in tyres
Drivetrain SRAM X1 32t
Brakes SRAM Guide RS 180/160mm
Components Whyte, RockShox Reverb Stealth
Sizes M, L, XL
Weight 13.4kg (29.5lb)
Contact whytebikes.com

GEOMETRY

Size tested L
Head angle 67.2°
Seat angle 68.6°
BB height 333mm
Chainstay 430mm
Front centre 766mm
Wheelbase 1,196mm
Down tube 730mm
Top tube 637mm
Reach 451mm

In a short space of time, Whyte has morphed from a relatively quirky brand into an innovator. First it switched its long-standing twin-link suspension design to a more conventional FSR layout, then it started pushing the boundaries of geometry and sizing. And it hasn't stopped pushing.

2015 sees Whyte add a whopping 20mm to the reach on all three frame sizes. It's a big step forward in terms of geometry and, with good sizing recommendations on the Whyte website, getting a bike that fits has never been easier.

Sizing isn't the headline news on the T-129 Works, however; it's the SCR tag that really marks a breakthrough in frame development. Inspired by SRAM's 1x11 drivetrains, this single chainring-only frame design capitalises on the void left behind now that XX1, XO1 and X1 have successfully eliminated the need for a front mech and multiple chainrings. The end result is a much wider main pivot with symmetrical chainstays to improve frame stiffness.

Another SRAM product that's helped shaped Whyte's latest creation is the RockShox Reverb Stealth. In addition to driving internal cable routing, having saddle height control at our fingertips has allowed Whyte to do away with the traditional seat collar, instead using its flush-fitting Intergrip expander wedge in the frame.

The T-129 also boasts one of the shortest chainstay lengths of any 29er suspension bike. At 430mm, it's 20mm shorter out back than the Orange or Specialized, making it much easier to loft the front wheel. We only wish Whyte wasn't so hell-bent on making it as short a possible, as 5mm extra tyre clearance would make it much easier to

get the rear wheel in and out of the frame. It would also prevent mud building up so quickly on the shelf that the wider main pivot forms behind the bottom bracket.

SUSPENSION

We've never been 100 per cent satisfied with the rear suspension on the T-129. The latest version with the Fox shock is an improvement, and it's impressive how well this 120mm-travel bike handles holes and compressions on more DH-orientated trails, even if that's not really the T-129's remit. It's still no match for the Specialized, though, and even with the rebound dial set to fully open, the rear suspension on the T-129 felt sluggish and robbed the bike of small-bump sensitivity and pop.

COMPONENTS

SRAM's new Guide RS brakes stop Shimano from getting a clean sweep in this test, but even on relatively short UK descents, we had issues with the bite-point changing on the Guides. Fingers crossed it was just due to poor bleeding from the internal cable routing.

The Maxxis High Roller II on the front of the Whyte doesn't get the softer 3C compound and had a tendency to ping off wet roots and rocks. As for the semi-slick Crossmark on the rear, it's a great choice for trail centre hacks or dry, dusty trails. So save the Crossmark for summer, stick the High Roller II on the rear and buy a 3C Maxxis Minion DHF for the front. Sorted!

PERFORMANCE

There's a very light action when pedalling the Whyte, which we can only attribute to the single-ring design. SRAM's 1x11

transmissions always exhibit this trait, but on the Whyte it's more pronounced. It's not quite the same as dancing up every climb like a seven-time Tour de France winner, but it felt more efficient than the Orange, even though both bikes are of a similar weight.

That's not to say the Whyte is the stiffest bike in test, however. Wheels play a massive part in overall stiffness, especially on a 29er, and the SRAM Roam 40s felt flexy when cornering hard. Also, the innocuous spoke protector rattled loose on one descent, nearly bringing this test to an abrupt end by wedging itself between the spokes and cassette and almost ripping off the rear mech. Moral of the story: ditch the spoke-guard before you leave the shop.

VERDICT

Whyte is driving geometry and sizing forward at an incredible pace, but the rear suspension on the T-129 is struggling to keep up. And we know that the Fox Float CTD shock isn't to blame, as it was a similar story when we tested the RockShox-equipped T-129s previously.

On any other bike, it probably wouldn't be such an issue, but the extra length up front allows you to ride the T-129 Works SCR faster than most, which only serves to highlight the shortcomings in the rear suspension.

8

WE LOVE

Forward-thinking geometry and killer price

WE HATE

The rear suspension needs a shot in the arm

The T-129 is held back by the sluggish rear suspension

Single-ring set-up lacks tyre clearance

Internally routed dropper with new Intergrip clamp

Conclusion

If you've just cut straight to the chase without reading the individual reviews it would be easy to assume that the most expensive bike was always going to win this 29er test. It is, after all, the most expensive bike. The logic then follows that it's got to be the best, right? Not so fast.

Time and time again the opposite is actually true in **mbr** group tests. That's because we always place outright performance above all else when evaluating each bike. The best bike always wins, plain and simple. And to that effect, the Specialized Camber Expert Evo was the best in test.

There's no denying that the wide spread of prices made this test a little trickier to call, but if you take a closer look at the detailed specifications opposite you'll see that in addition to being a great riding bike the Specialized Camber is also better value than both its rivals. Yes the carbon front-end bumps up the price, but it also increases stiffness while driving down the overall weight of the Camber by more than half a kilo. No amount of money thrown at fancy new components on the Orange or Whyte will ever achieve that level of weight saving. As a result, the Camber will always be one step ahead at the weigh-in and, more importantly, less effort to ride out on the trail.

But it's not just the lightweight carbon frame that gives the Camber an edge. Finishing kit like the carbon cranks and Roval wheels are of a higher spec than those on the Orange and Whyte too. All in, the Camber is over one kilo lighter than the similarly priced Orange (once you factor in all the additional costs of the upgrades) and 0.89kg lighter than the Whyte. And that's with Specialized's SWAT kit thrown in for good measure.

So the Camber is lighter than the competition, but is that really all that sets it apart? Hardly. It was actually its superior ride quality that won us over. Specifically, how well its suspension performed in every situation. It's not that the rear suspensions on the Orange and Whyte were bad, far from it, it's just that when you sling a leg over the Camber you get to experience what really good suspension can do for a bike. Not only was the Camber more comfortable and efficient to ride, the rear suspension gave the bike more life, grip, agility and the unmatched ability to shred every trail. In many ways how the suspension behaves is even more important than the static geometry as it has an even greater influence on the dynamic behaviour of the bike.

Could the Camber be better? Every bike is a compromise, so of course it could always be improved in one area at the expense of something else. Could it be longer? Possibly. Slacker? Maybe. Would it be better with more travel? Perhaps. In fact that bike already exists! So if you're thinking along those lines just buy the Stumpy Expert Evo 29 and be done with it. For everyone else, the 120mm Camber is still more bike than most of us will ever need.



Camber Expert Evo:
a deserving winner
on all fronts

RANGE FINDER

Our test winner's stablemates

SPECIALIZED CAMBER EVO

£2,000

The entry-level Camber Evo is a force to be reckoned with. It shares the same attitude and ferocious appetite for trail riding as the Expert Evo tested here, but the sleek M5 alloy front-end and price-conscious build kit means it's less than half the price of its carbon stablemate. It's no half measure, though. Danny has just taken delivery of one as his next longterm and you can read his first impressions on p84.



SPECIALIZED STUMPJUMPER FSR EXPERT EVO 29

£4,600

There's very little separating the components adorning the Camber Expert Evo and the Stumpy 29. Both frames get carbon front-ends and alloy stays, but a slight shift in geometry and travel sets them apart. With a 140mm RockShox Pike fork and 135mm travel on the rear, the Stumpy is much more capable in big terrain. It's still an out and out trail bike, though, and a great one at that. Which is why the Comp version was our 2014 Bike of the Year.



SPECIFICATION

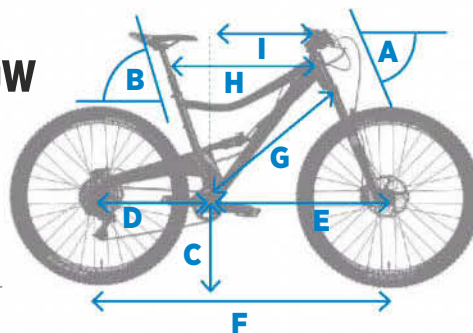
This month's bikes at a glance

Make/model	Orange Segment RS	Specialized Camber Expert Evo	Whyte T-129 Works SCR
Price	£4,300	£4,500	£3,099
Weight	13.64kg (29.9lb)	12.5kg (27.6lb)	13.4kg (29.5lb)
Contact	orangebikes.co.uk	specialized.com	whytebikes.com
FRAME			
Sizes	M, L, XL	S, M, L, XL	M, L, XL
Size tested	L	L	L
Frame material	6061 T-6 aluminium	Fact 9M carbon/M5 alloy	6061 T-6 aluminium
Suspension fork	RockShox Pike RCT3	RockShox Pike RC	RockShox Pike RC
Rear shock	RockShox Monarch RL	Fox Float CTD Factory	Fox Float CTD Factory
Front travel	120mm	120mm	120mm
Rear travel	110mm	120mm	120mm
WHEELS			
Hubs	Hope Pro II Evo 15/142mm	Roval Traverse 15/142mm	SRAM Roam 40 15/142mm
Rims	Stans Arch EX29	Roval Fattie 29	SRAM Roam 40
Spokes	Stainless	Roval	Stainless
Tyres	Maxxis Minion DHF 3C/High Roller II 29x2.3in	Specialized Butcher/Ground Control 29x2.3in	Maxxis High Roller II/ Crossmark 29x2.3/2.1in
GROUPSET			
Shifters	SRAM X1	SRAM X1	SRAM X1
Front mech	MRP X1 Guide	N/A	N/A
Rear mech	SRAM X1	SRAM XO1	SRAM X1
Crank	SRAM X1 30t	SRAM S-2200 30t	SRAM X1 32t
Bottom bracket	SRAM GXP	SRAM PF30	SRAM GXP
Brakes	Shimano XT	Shimano XT	SRAM Guide RS
Rotor sizes	180mm	200/180mm	180/160mm
COMPONENTS			
Saddle	SDG Falcon	BG Henge Comp	Whyte
Seatpost	RockShox Reverb Stealth	Command Post Blacklite IR	RockShox Reverb Stealth
Handlebar	Renthal FatBar Lite 740mm	Specialized XC 750mm	Whyte 750mm
Stem	Thomson X4 50mm	Specialized 70mm	Whyte Gravity 50mm
Rating	7	10	8

NOTES ON THE NUMBERS

Keep it on the down low

Here are three short-travel 29ers designed to get from A to B in the shortest time possible while having the most fun doing it, but each brand has approached the solution in a different way. Orange has gone slackest on the head angle for increased steering stability, and this also gives the Segment a slightly longer front-end than the Specialized, even though the down-tube lengths on both bikes are within 1mm of each other. And while the 4mm lower BB on the Specialized doesn't sound like a big deal, it actually has a huge impact on the stability of the bike. That's because it lowers the heaviest component on the bike... the rider!



With no front mech to contend with, Whyte has slammed the rear wheel as close to the BB as possible to achieve an impressively short 430mm chainstay length. This, combined with the longest front-end on test, gives the T-129 a more rearward

	Orange Segment RS	Specialized Camber Expert Evo	Whyte T-129 Works SCR
A Head angle	66.6°	68.5°	67.2°
B Seat angle	70.9°	68.5°	68.6°
C BB height	333mm	329mm	333mm
D Chainstay	450mm	450mm	430mm
E Front centre	735mm	717mm	766mm
F Wheelbase	1,185mm	1,167mm	1,196mm
G Down tube	707mm	706mm	730mm
H Top tube	620mm	619mm	637mm
I Reach	444mm	432mm	451mm

weight bias. The end result is that the front wheel is much easier to get off the ground, but it also means you need to sit further forward on the saddle to stop the front from lifting on steep climbs.



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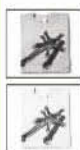
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100% combed cotton



ROUTE CYCLING RANGE

MENS BICYCLE T-SHIRT: INDIGO

Combed 100% organic cotton, slim fitting



£26

100% combed cotton



ROUTE CYCLING RANGE

WOMENS REFLECTIVE WHEEL T-SHIRT

This garment uses light-reflective ink, this bamboo cotton t-shirt will help you be seen in low light. Both the front & rear are printed using silver light reflective ink. Combined with 30% organic cotton and 70% bamboo, bamboo fabric is super soft and also double ups as an ideal base layer for colder weather. Naturally odour resistant.

£30

A natural performance fabric



ROUTE CYCLING RANGE

WOMENS BICYCLE T-SHIRT: LT BLUE

Combed 100% organic cotton, slim fitting



£26

100% combed cotton



ROUTE CYCLING RANGE

WOMENS CRASH T-SHIRT: LT BLUE

Combed 100% organic cotton, slim fitting



£26

100% combed cotton



ROUTE CYCLING RANGE

Men's sizing: Small 35-37 inch chest, Medium 38-40 inch chest, Large 41-43 inch chest. All slim fitting. Women's sizing: Small - Size 10, Medium - Size 12, Large - Size 14, XL - Size 16 (UK Ladies Dress Size)

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*Our favourite
people choose their
favourite photos*

AS CHOSEN BY...

**MICK KIRKMAN
PHOTOGRAPHER**



Who: Chris Akrigg
Where: Kaprun, Austria
When: 2012
Photographer: Mick Kirkman



From mucking about on BMXs as a kid, to, er, mucking about on MTBs as a big kid, freelance writer/tester Mick's most at home on two wheels. Pretty handy with a camera too, he's mastered the art of the self-portrait action shot.

After the Leogang World Champs in 2012, a few of us stayed on at a great biking hotel called Spielberghaus in Saalbach. The Austrian owner, Walter, was a big Chris Akrigg fan and arranged to take us up high onto the Kitzsteinhorn to let Chris do his thing for a magazine feature. This involved shooting photos on stupidly steep rock and scree in the zone between the ice and the cable car station, and — in typical Akrigg style — he made riding it look ridiculously easy.

It's hard to believe some of the stuff Chris can ride down, and I've always liked how he's not too flashy or into doing big stunts either — it's more about making everything neat and stylish, whatever the

kind of riding or bike he's on.

This shot sums that up well to me and I was really happy with the interview feature that went with it. It's a move we would have called a kick-turn when I was a kid, only it would be on a trick ramp in a backstreet, not on some crazy rock next to a 3,000m high glacier.

One thing I never imagined, pedalling my little BMX around, was how often a bike would take me to amazing places like this. Well, the addiction isn't slowing down, wheels keep turning and mountain biking brings more new sights, people and experiences all the time, and that's why it's such an awesome sport to be involved in.

We shot on stupidly steep rock and scree in the zone between the ice and cable car station — Chris made riding it look easy

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